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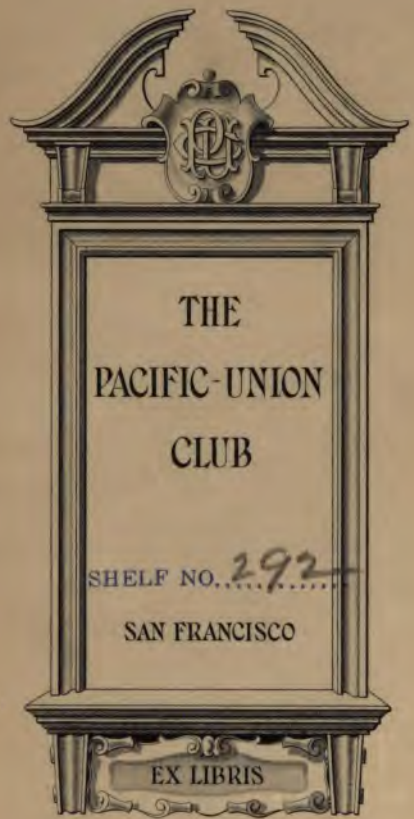
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# HELD IN BONDAGE

OR

## GRANVILLE DE VIGNE

*A TALE OF THE DAY*

By OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF "TRICOTRIN," "A DOG OF FLANDERS," "PASCAREL," "TWO LITTLE WOODEN SHOES," ETC.

"A young man married is a man that's marred."—SHAKESPEARE.



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# PREFACE.

THIS, the earliest work I ever wrote, is full of errors both of structure and of style. I have thought it, however, useless to attempt any correction of these. I lament the innumerable faults in Art which necessarily arise in it from having been constructed as that mistaken thing "a novel with a purpose." And I trust that no reader will form any judgment upon me as a writer from this very immature and most imperfect romance. At the same time that I regret its artistic shortcomings, I fully adhere to the main opinions which form its basis. It is, indeed, my confirmed impression of their absolute truth which makes me now offer this apology for the inadequate skill wherewith, in these pages, I have defended them.

OUIDA.

THE LANGHAM, LONDON,
April 10, 1870.

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# HELD IN BONDAGE

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SENIOR PUPIL OF THE CHANCERY.

It was pleasant down there in Berkshire, when the water rushed beneath the keel; our oars feathered neatly on the ringing rowlocks; the river foamed and flew as we gripped it; and the alders and willows tossed in the sunshine, while we—private pupils, as our tutor called us—men, as we called ourselves—used to pull up the Kennet, as though we were some of an University Eight, and lunch at the Ferry Inn off raw chops and half-and-half, making love to its big-boned, red-haired Hebe, and happy as kings in those summer days, in the dead years long past and gone. What a royal time it was!—(who amongst us does not say so?)—when our hearts owned no heavier cares than a vulgus, and a theorem; and no skeleton in the closet spoiled our trolling and long bowling! when old Horace and Euripides were the only bores we knew; and Galatæa at the pastry-cook's seemed fairer than do ever titled Helens now; when gallops on hired shying hacks were doubly dear, by prohibition; and filthy bird's-eye, smoked in clays, sweeter to our senses then, than purest Havannahs smoked to-day, on the steps of Pratt's or the U.S.! I often think of those days when, with a handsome tip, from the dear old governor; and a parting injunction respecting the unspeakable blessings and advantages of flannel, from my mother; I was sent off to be a private pupil, under the Rev. Josiah Prim-

rose, D.D., F.R.S., F.R.G.S., and all the letters of the alphabet beside, I dare say, if I could but remember them.

Our modern Gamaliel was an immaculate and insignificant little man; who, on the strength of a Double First, good connexions, and M.B. waistcoats, offered to train up the sons of noblemen and gentlemen, in the way they should go, drill Greek, and instil religious principles into them, for the trifling consideration of £300 per annum. He lived in a quiet little borough in the south of Berkshire, at a long, low, ivy-clad house, called the Chancery: which had stupendous pretensions to the picturesque and the mediæval; and, what was of much more consequence to us, a capital little trout stream at the bottom of its grounds. Here he dwelt with a fat old housekeeper, a very good cook, a quasi-juvenile niece (who went in for the kitten line, and did it very badly, too,) and four, or, when times were good, six, hot-brained young dogs, worse to keep in order than a team of unbroke thorough-breds. No authority, however, did our Doctor, in familiar parlance, "Old Joey," attempt to exercise. We had prayers at eight, which he read in a style of intoning peculiar to himself, more soporific in its effects than a scientific lecture, or an Exeter Hall meeting, and dinner at six, a very good dinner too; over which the fair Arabella presided; and between those hours we amused ourselves as we chose, with cricket and smoking, jack and trout, boating and swimming, rides on hacks, such as jobmasters let out to young fellows with long purses; and desperate flirtations with all the shop girls in Frestonhills. We *did* do an amount of Greek and Logic, of course, as otherwise the £300 might have been jeopardised; but the Doctor was generally dreaming over his possible chance of the Bampton Lectureship, or his next report for the Geological Society, and was as glad to give us our *congé* as we were to take it.

It was a mild September evening, I remember, when I first went to the Chancery. I had been a little down in the mouth at leaving home, just in the best of the shooting season; and at saying good-bye to my genial-hearted governor, and my own highly-prized bay, "Ballet-girl:" but a brisk coach drive and a good inn dinner never yet failed to raise a boys spirits, and by the time I reached Frestonhills I was ready to face a much more imposing individual than

"Old Joey." The Doctor received me in his library, with a suspicious appearance of having just tumbled out of a nap; called me his "dear young friend;" on my first introduction treated me to a text or two, ingeniously dovetailed with classic quotations; took me to the drawing-room for presentation to his niece, who smiled graciously on me for the sake of the pines, and melons, and game my mother had sent as a propitiatory offering with her darling; and, finally, consigned me to the tender mercies of the senior pupil.

The senior pupil was standing with his back to the fire and his elbows on the mantel-piece, smoking a short pipe, in the common study. He was but just eighteen; but even then he had more of the "grand air" about him than anyone else I had ever seen. His figure, from its developed muscle, broad chest, and splendidly modelled arm, might have passed him for much older; but in his face were all the spirit, the eagerness, the fire of early youth; the glow of ardour that has never been chilled, the longing of the young gladiator for the untried arena. His features were clear-cut, proud and firm; the lines of the lips delicate and haughty; his eyes were long, dark, and keen as a falcon's; his brow was wide, high and powerful; his head grandly set upon his throat: he looked altogether, as I told him some time afterwards, very like a thorough-bred racer, who was longing to do the distance, and who would never allow punishing by curb, or whip, or snaffle. Such was the senior pupil, Granville de Vigne. He was alone, and took his pipe out of his lips without altering his position.

"Well, sir, what's your name?"

"Chevasney."

"Not a bad one. A Chevasney of Longholme?"

"Yes. John Chevasney's son."

"So you are coming to be fleeced by Old Joey? Deuced pity! Are you good for anything?"

"Only for grilling a devil, and riding cross country."

He threw back his head, and laughed, a clear ringing laugh; and gave me his hand, cordially and frankly, for all his hauteur and his seniority.

"You'll do. Sit down, innocent. I am Granville de Vigne. You know *us*, of course. Your father rode with our hounds last January. Very game old gentleman, he

seemed; I should have thought him too sensible to have sent you down here! You'd have been much better at Eton, or Rugby; there's nothing like a public school for taking the nonsense out of people. I liked Eton, at least; but if you know how to hold your own and have your own way, you can make yourself comfortable anywhere, The other fellows are out, gone to a flower show, I think; I never go to such places myself, they're too slow. There is only one of the boys worth cultivating, and he's a very little chap, only thirteen, but he's a jolly little monkey; we call him 'Curly,' from his dandy gold locks. His father's a peer"—and De Vigne laughed again—"one of the fresh creation; may Heaven preserve us from it! This Frestonhills is a detestable place; you'll be glad enough to get out of it. If it weren't for sport, I should have cut it long ago, but with a hunter and a rod a man can never be dull. Are you a good shot, seat, and oar, young one?'

Those were De Vigne's first words to me, and I was honoured and delighted with his notice, for I had heard how, at seven years old, he had ridden unnoticed to the finish with Assheton Smith's hounds; how, three years later, he had mounted a mare none of the grooms dare touch, and breaking his shoulder-bone in the attempt to tame her, had shut his teeth like a little Spartan, that he might not cry out during its setting; how, when he had seen his Newfoundland drowning from cramp in the mere, he had plunged in after his dog, and only been rescued as both were sinking, the boy's arms round the animal's neck: —with many other such tales current in the county of the young heir to £20,000 a year.

I *did* know his family—the royal-sounding "Us." They had been the lords of the manor at Vigne ever since tradition could tell; their legends were among the country lore, and their names in the old cradle songs of rough chivalry, and vague romance, handed down among the peasantry from generation to generation. Many coronets had lain at their feet, but they had courteously declined them; to say the truth they held the strawberry-leaves in supreme contempt, and looked down not unjustly on many of the *roturiers* of the peerage.

De Vigne's father, a Colonel of Dragoons, had fallen fighting in India when his son was six years old; and how

this high-spirited representative of a haughty House came to be living down in the dull seclusion of Frestonhills was owing to a circumstance very characteristic of De Vigne. At twelve his mother had sent him to Eton, a match in pluck, and muscle, and talent, for boys five years his senior. There he helped to fight the Lord's men; pounded bargees with a skill worthy of the P. R.; made himself captain of the boats; enjoyed mingled popularity and detestation; and from thence, when he was seventeen, got himself expelled.

His Dame chanced to have a niece—a niece, tradition says, with the loveliest complexion and the most divine auburn hair in the world, and with whom, when she visited her aunt, all Oppidans and Tugs, who saw the beatific vision, became straightway enamoured. Whether De Vigne was in love with her, I can't say; he always averred *not*, but I doubt the truth of his statement; at any rate, he made her in love with him, being already rather skilled in that line of conquest, and all, I dare say, went merry as a marriage-bell, till the Dame found out the mischief, was scandalised and horrified at it, and confiding the affair to the tutor, made no end of a row in Eton. She would have pulled all the authorities about De Vigne's ears, if he had not performed that operation for himself. The tutor, having had a tender leaning to the auburn hair on his own account, was furious; and coming in contact with De Vigne and mademoiselle strolling along by the river-side, took occasion to tell them his mind. Now opposition, much less lecturing, De Vigne in all his life never could brook; and he and his tutor coming to hot words, as men are apt when they quarrel about a woman, De Vigne flung him into the water and gave him such a ducking for his impudence, as Eton master never had before, or since. De Vigne, of course, was expelled for his double crime; and to please his mother, as nothing would make him hear of three years of college life, he consented to live twelve months in the semi-academic solitude of Frestonhills, while his name was entered at the Horse Guards for a commission. So at the Chancery he had domiciled himself, more as a guest than a pupil, for the Doctor was a trifle afraid of his keen eyes and quick wit; since his pupil knew twenty times more of modern literature and valuable available information than himself,

and fifty times more of the world and its ways. But Old Joey, like all people, be their tendencies ever so heavenward, had a certain respect for twenty thousand a year. De Vigne kept two hunters and a hack in Frestonhills. He smoked Cavendish under the Doctor's own window; he read De Kock and Le Brun in the drawing-room before the Doctor's very eyes (and did not Miss Arabella read them too, upon the sly, though she blushed if you mentioned poor "Don Juan!") he absented himself when he chose and went to shoot and hunt and fish with men he knew in the county; he had his own way, in fact, as he had been accustomed to have it all his life. But it was not an obstinate nor a disagreeable "own way:" true he turned restive at the least attempt at coercion, but he was gentle enough to a coax; and though he could work up into very fiery passion, he was, generally speaking, sweet tempered enough, and had almost always a kind word, or a generous thought, or a laughing jest, for us less favoured young ones.

I had a sort of boyish devoted loyalty to him then, and he deserved it. Many a scrape did a word or two from him get me out of with the Doctor; many a time did he send me into the seventh heaven by the loan of his magnificent four-year-old; more than once did fivers come from his hand when I was deep in debt for a boy's fancies, or had been cheated through thick and thin at the billiard-table in the Ten Bells, where De Vigne paid my debts, refreshed himself by kicking the two sharpers out of the apartment, and threatened to shoot me if I offered him the money back again. A warm-hearted reverence I had for him in those boyish days, and always have had, God bless him! But I little foresaw how often in the life to come we should be together in revelry and in danger, in thoughtless pleasures and dark sorrow, in the whirl of fast life and din and dash of the battle-field, when I first saw the senior pupil smoking in the study of the old Chancery at Frestonhills.

One sunny summer's afternoon, while the Doctor dosed over his "Treatise on the Wise Tooth of the Fossil Hum-and-bosh Ichthyosaurus," and Arabella watered her geraniums and looked interesting in a white hat with very blue ribbons, De Vigne, with his fishing-rod in his hand, looked into the study, and told Curly and me, who were vainly and wretchedly puzzling our brains over Terence, that he was

going after jack, and we might go with him if we chose. Curly and I, in our adoration of our senior pupil, would have gone after him to martyrdom, and we sent Terence to the dogs (literally, for we shied him at Arabella's wheezing King Charles), rushed for our rods and baskets, and went down to the banks of the Kennet. De Vigne had an especial tenderness for old Izaak's gentle art: it was the only thing over which he displayed any patience, and even in this, he might have caught more, if he had not twitched his line so often in anger at the slow-going fish, and sworn against them for not biting, roundly enough to terrify them out of all such intentions, if they had ever possessed any!

How pleasant it was there beside Pope's

"Kennet swift, for silver eels renowned,"

rushing through the sunny meadow lands of Berkshire; lingering on its way, beneath the chequered shadows of the oaks and elms, that rival their great neighbours, the beech-woods of Bucks; dashing swiftly, with busy joyous song, under the rough-hewn arch of some picturesque rustic, bridge; flowing clear and cool in the summer sun through the fragrant woodlands and moss-grown orchards, the nestling villages and quiet country towns, and hawthorn hedges dropping their white buds into its changeful gleaming waters! How pleasant it was, fishing for jack among our Kennet meadows, lying under the pale willows and the dark wayfaring tree with its white starry blossoms, while the cattle trooped down to drink, up to their hocks in the flags and lilies and snowflakes fringing the river's edge; and the air came fresh and fragrant over the swathes of new-mown grass and the crimson buds of the little dog-roses! Half its beauty, however, was lost upon us with our boyish density to all appeals made to our less material senses; except, indeed, upon De Vigne, who stopped to have a glance across country as he stood trolling, spinning the line with much more outlay of strength and vehemence than was needed, or landing every now and then a ten-pound pike, with a violent anathema upon it for having dared to dispute his will so long; while little Curly lazily whipped the water, stretched full length on a fragrant bed of wild thyme. What a pretty child he was, poor little fellow; more like one of Pompadour's pages, or a boy-hero

of the Trouvères, with his white skin and his violet eyes, than an every-day slang-talking, lark-loving English lad!

"By George! what a handsome girl," said De Vigne, taking off his cap and standing at ease for a minute, after landing a great jack. "I'm not fond of dark women generally, but 'pon my life she is splendid. What a contour! What a figure! Do for the Queen of the gipsies, eh? Why the deuce isn't she this side of the river?"

The object of his admiration was on the opposite bank, strolling along by herself with a certain dignity of air and stateliness of step which would not have ill become a duchess, though her station in life was probably that of a dressmaker's apprentice, or a small shopkeeper's daughter, at the very highest. She was as handsome as one of those brunette peasant beauties in the plains of La Camargue, with a clear dark skin which had a rich carnation glow on the cheeks; large black eyes, perfect in shape and colour; and a form such as would develop with years—for she was now probably not more than sixteen or seventeen—into full Junoesque magnificence.

"By Jove! she is very handsome; and she knows it, too," began De Vigne again. "I have never seen her about here before. I'll go across and talk to her."

Go he assuredly would have done, for female beauty was De Vigne's weakness; but at that minute a short, square, choleric-looking keeper came out of the wood at our back, and went up to little Curly.

"Hallo, you there—you young swell; don't you know you are trespassing?"

"No, I don't," answered Curly, in his pretty soft voice.

"Don't you know you're on Mr. Tressillian's ground?" sang out the keeper.

"Am I? Well, give my love to him, and say I shall be very happy to give him the pleasure of my company at dinner to-night," rejoined Curly, imperturbably.

"You impertinent young dog—will you march off this 'ere minute!" roared the bellicose guardian of Mr. Tressillian's rights of fishery.

"Wouldn't you like to see me?" laughed Curly, flinging his marchbrown into the stream.

"Curse you, if you don't, I'll come and take your rod away," sang out the keeper

"Will you really? That'll be too obliging, you look so sweet and amiable as it is," said Curly, with a provoking smile on his girlish little face.

"Yes, I *will;* and take you up to the house and get you a month at the mill for trespass, you abominable little devil!" vowed his adversary, laying his great fist on Curly's rod; but the little chap sprang to his feet and struck him a vigorous blow with his childish hand, which fell on the keeper's brawny form, much as a fly's kick might on the Apollo Belvidere. The man seized him round the waist, but Curly struck out right and left, and kicked and struggled with such hearty good will, that the keeper let him go! but, keeping his hand on the boy's collar, he was about to drag him up to the lord of the manor, whose house stood some mile distant, when, at the sound of the scuffle, De Vigne, intent upon watching his beauty across the Kennet, swung round to Curly's rescue: the boy being rather a pet of his, and De Vigne never seeing a fight between might and right without striking in with a blow for the weak one.

"Take your hands off that young gentleman! Take your hands off, do you hear? or I will give you in charge for assault."

"Will yer, Master Stilts," growled the keeper, purple with dire wrath. "I'll give *you* in charge, you mean. You're poaching—ay, poaching, for all yer grand airs; and I'll be hanged if I don't take you and the little uns, all of yer, up to the house, and see if a committal don't take the rise out of yer, my game cocks!"

Wherewith the keeper, whom anger must have totally blinded ere he attemped such an indignity with our senior pupil, whose manorial rights stretched over woods and waters twenty times the extent of Boughton Tressillian's, let go his hold upon Curly, and turned upon De Vigne, to collar him instead.

De Vigne's eyes flashed, and the blood mounted hot over his temples, as he straightened his left arm, and received him by a plant in the middle of his chest, with a dexterity that would had done no discredit to Tom Sayers. Down went the man under the tremendous punishing, only to pick himself up again, and charge at De Vigne with all the fury which, in such attacks, defeats its own ends, and

makes a man strike wildly and at random. De Vigne however had not had mills at Eton, and rounds with bargees at Little Surley, without becoming a boxer, such as would have delighted a Ring at Moulsey. He threw himself into a scientific attitude; and contenting himself with the defensive for the first couple of rounds, without being touched himself, caught the keeper on the left temple, with a force which sent him down like a felled ox. There the man lay, like a dog, on the thyme and ground-ivy and woodbine, till I fancy his conqueror had certain uncomfortable suspicions that he might have killed him. So he lifted him up, gave him a good shake, and finding him all right, though he was bleeding profusely, was frightfully vengeful, and full of most unrighteous oaths, though not apparently willing to encounter such another round, De Vigne pushed him on before him, and took him up to Mr. Tressillian's to keep his word, and give him in charge.

Weive Hurst, Boughton Tressillian's manor-house, was a fine, rambling, antique old place, its façade looking all the greyer and the older in contrast to the green lawn, with its larches, fountains, and flower beds which stretched in front. The powdered servant who opened the door looked not a little startled at our unusual style of morning visit; but gave way before De Vigne, and showed us into the library, where Mr. Tressillian sat—a stately, kindly, silver-haired old man. De Vigne sank into the easy chair wheeled for him, told his tale frankly and briefly, demonstrated, as clearly as if he had been a lawyer, our right to fish on the highway side of the river (an often-disputed point for anglers), and the consequent illegality of the keeper's assault. Boughton Tressillian was open to conviction, though he *was* a county magnate and a magistrate, admitted that he had no right over that part of the Kennet, agreed with De Vigne that his keeper was in the wrong, promised to give the man a good lecture, and apologised to his visitor for the interference and the affront.

"If you will stay and dine with me, Mr. De Vigne, and your young friends also, it will give me very great pleasure;" said the cordial and courteous old man.

"I thank you. We should have been most happy," returned our senior pupil; "but as it is, I am afraid we shall be late for Dr. Primrose."

"For Dr. Primrose?" exclaimed Tressillian, involuntarily. "You are not——"

"I am a pupil at the Chancery," laughed De Vigne.

Our host actually started; De Vigne certainly did look very little like a pupil of any man's; but he smiled in return.

"Indeed! Then I hope you will often give me the pleasure of your society. There is a billiard-table in wet weather, and good fishing and shooting in fine. It will be a great kindness, I assure you, to come and enliven us at Weive Hurst a little."

"The kindness will be to us," returned De Vigne, cordially. "Good-day to you, Mr. Tressillian; accept my best thanks for your——"

A shower of roses, lilies, and laburnums, pelted at him with a merry laugh, stopped his harangue. The culprit was a little girl of about two years old, standing just outside the low windows of the library—a pretty child, with golden hair waving to her waist, and no end of mischief in her dark blue eyes. Unlike most children, she was not at all frightened at her own misdemeanours, but stood her ground, till Boughton Tressillian stretched out his arm to catch her. Then, she turned round, and took wing as rapidly as a bird off a bough, her clear childish laughter ringing on the summer air; while De Vigne gave chase to the only child in his life he ever deigned to notice, justly thinking children great nuisances, and led her prisoner to the library, holding the blue sash by which he had caught her.

"Here is my second captive, Mr. Tressillian—what shall we do to her?"

Boughton Tressillian smiled.

"Alma, how could you be so naughty? Tell this gentleman you are a spoilt child, and ask him to forgive you."

She looked up under her long black lashes half shyly, half wickedly.

"*Signor, perdonatemi!*" she said, with a mischievous laugh, in broken Italian, though how a little Berkshire girl came to talk Neapolitan instead of English I could not imagine.

"Alma, you are very naughty to-day," said Tressillian, half impatiently. "Why do you not speak English? Ask his forgiveness properly."

"I will pardon her without it," laughed De Vigne. "There, Alma, will you not love me now?"

She pushed her sunny hair off her eyes and looked at him—a strangely earnest and wistful look, too, for so young a child. "*Si! Alma vi ama?*" she answered him with joyous vivacity, pressing upon him with eager generosity some geraniums the head-gardener had given her, and which but a moment ago she had fastened into her white dress with extreme admiration and triumph.

"Bravo!" said Curly, as five minutes afterwards we passed out from the great hall door. "You *are* a brick, De Vigne, and no mistake. How splendidly you pitched into that rascally keeper!"

De Vigne laughed.

"It was a good bit of fun. Always stand up for your rights, my boy; if you don't, who will? I never was done yet in my life, and never intend to be."

With such wise resolution the senior pupil struck a fusee and lit his pipe; reaching home just in time to dress, and hand Arabella in to dinner, who paid him at all times desperate court, hoping, doubtless, to make such an impression on him with her long ringlets, and bravura songs, as might trap him in his early youth into such "serious" action as would make her mistress of Vigne and its long rent-roll. That Granville saw no more of her than he could help in common courtesy, and paid her not so much attention as he did to her King Charles, was no check to the young lady's wild imaginings. At eight-and-twenty women grown desperate don't stick to probabilities, but fly their hawks at any or at all quarries, so that "peradventure they may catch one!"

Weive Hurst proved a great gain to us. Tressillian was as good as his word, and we were at all times cordially welcomed there, when the Doctor gave us permission, to shoot and fish and ride about his grounds. He grew extremely fond of De Vigne, who, haughty as he could be at times, and impatient as he was at any of the Doctor's weak attempts at coercion, had a very winning manner with old people; and played billiards, heard his tales of the Regency, and broke in his colts for him, till he fairly won his way into Tressillian's heart. It was for De Vigne that the butler was always bid to bring the Steinberg and the 1815 port; De Vigne, to whom he gave a mare worth five hundred sovs., the most beautiful piece of horse-flesh ever mounted; De

Vigne, who might have knocked down every head of game in the preserves if he had chosen; De Vigne, to whom little Alma Tressillian, the old man's only grand-child, and the future heiress, of course, of Weive Hurst, presented with the darling of her heart—a donkey, minus head or tail or panniers.

But De Vigne did not avail himself of the sport at Weive Hurst so much as he might have done had he no other game in hand. His affair with Tressillian's keeper had prevented his going to make impromptu acquaintance with the handsome girl across the Kennet; but she had not slipped from his mind, and had made sufficient impression upon him for him to try the next day to see her again in Frestonhills, and find out who she was and where she lived, two questions he soon settled, by some means or other, greatly to his own satisfaction. The girl's name was Lucy Davis; whence she came nobody knew or perhaps inquired; but she was one of the hands at a milliner's in Frestonhills, prized by her employers for her extreme talent and skill, though equally detested, I believe, for her tyrannous and tempestuous temper. The girl was handsome enough for an Empress; and had wonderful style in her when she was dressed in her Sunday silks and cashmeres, for dress was her passion, and all her earnings were spent in imitating the toilettes she assisted in getting up to adorn the rectors' and lawyers' wives of Frestonhills. "The Davis" was handsome enough to send a much older man mad after her; and De Vigne, after meeting her once or twice in the deep shady lanes of our green Berkshire, accompanied her in her strolls, and—fell in love with her, as De Vigne had a knack of doing with every handsome woman who came near him. *We* all adored the stately, black-eyed, black-browed Davis, but she never deigned any notice of our boyish worship: and when De Vigne came into the field, we gave up all hope, and fled the scene in desperation. The Doctor, of course, knew nothing of the affair, though almost every one else in Frestonhills did, especially the young bankers and solicitors and grammar-school assistant-masters, who swore at that "cursed fellow at the Chancery" for monopolising the Davis—especially as the "cursed fellow" treated them considerably *de haut en bas*.

De Vigne was really in love, for the time being; one of those hot, vehement, short-lived attachments natural to his

age and character; based on eye-love alone, for the girl had nothing else lovable about her, and had one of the worst tempers possible; which she did not always spare even to him, and which when his first glamour had a little cooled, made De Vigne rather glad that his departure from Frestonhills was drawing near, some four months after he had seen her across the Kennet, and would give him an opportunity to break off his liaison, which he otherwise might have found it difficult to make.

The evening of the day which had brought the letter which announced him as gazetted to the —th P. W. O. Hussars: little Curly and I, having been sent with a message to a neighbouring rector from the Doctor, were riding by turns on Miss Arabella's white pony, talking over the coming holidays' "vacation," as old Joey called them, and of the long sunny future that stretched before us in dim golden haze,—so near, and yet so far from our young longing eyes—when De Vigne's terrier rolled out of a hedge, and jumped upon us.

"Holloa!" cried Curly, "where's your master, eh boy? There he is, by Jove! Arthur, talking to the Davis. What prime fun! I wish I dare chaff him!"

Curly, being on the pony's back, could see over the hedge; I could not, so I swung myself upon an elm-bough, and saw at some little distance De Vigne and Lucy Davis in very earnest conversation, or rather, as it seemed to me, altercation; for De Vigne was switching the long meadow grass impatiently with his cane, looking pale and annoyed, while the girl Davis stood before him, seemingly in one of those violent furies which reputation attributed to her, by turns adjuring, abusing, and threatening him.

Curly and I stayed some minutes looking at them, for the scene piqued our interest, making us think of Eugéne Sue, and Dumas, and all the love scenes we had devoured, when the Doctor supposed us plodding at the *Pons Asinorum* or the *De Officiis:* but we could make nothing of it, except that De Vigne and the Davis were quarrelling; and an intuitive perception, that the senior pupil would not admire our playing the spy on him, made me leave my elm-branch, and Curly start off the pony homewards.

That night De Vigne was silent and gloomy in the drawing-room: gave us but a brief "Good night," and shut

his bedroom door with a bang; the next morning, however, he seemed all right again, as he breakfasted for the last time in the old Chancery.

"What a lucky fellow you are, De Vigne!" sighed Curly, enviously, as he stood in the hall, waiting for the fly to take him to the station.

He laughed:

"Oh, I don't know! We shall see if we all say so this time twenty years! If I could foresee the future, I wouldn't: I love the glorious uncertainty; it is the only *sauce piquante* one has, and I can't say I fear fate very much!"

And well he might not at eighteen! Master, when he came of age, of a splendid fortune, his own guide, his own arbiter, able to see life in all its most deliciously attractive forms, truly it seemed that he, if any one, might trust to the *sauce piquante* of uncertain fate? *Qui lira, verra.*

Off he went by the express with his portmanteaus, lettered, as we enviously read, "Granville De Vigne, Esq.,—th P. W. O. Hussars;" off with *Punch* and an Havannah to amuse him on the way, to much more than Exeter Barracks,—on the way to Manhood; with all its chances and its changes, its wild revels and its dark regrets, its sparkling champagne-cup, and its bitter aconite lying at the dregs! Off he went, and we, left behind in the dull solitude of academic Frestonhills, watched the smoke curling from the engine as it disappeared round the bend of a cutting, and wondered in vague schoolboy fashion what sort of thing De Vigne would make of Life.

## CHAPTER II.

### "A SOUTHERLY WIND AND A CLOUDY SKY PROCLAIM IT A HUNTING MORNING."

"CONFOUND it, I can't cram, and I won't cram, so there's an end of it!" sang out a Cantab one fine October morning, flinging Plato's Republic to the far end of the room, where it knocked down a grind-cup, smashed a punch-bowl, and

cracked the glass, that glazed the charms of the last pet of the ballet.

The sun streamed through the oriel windows of my rooms in dear old Trinity. The roaring fire crackled, blazed and chatted away to a slate-coloured Skye that lay full-length before it. The table was spread with coffee, audit, devils, omelets, hare-pies, and all the other articles of the buttery. The sunshine within, shone on pipes and pictures, tobacco-boxes and little bronzes, books, cards, cigar-cases, statuettes, portraits of Derby winners, and likenesses of fair Anonymas —all in confusion tumbled pell-mell together among sofas and easy-chairs, rifles, cricket-bats, boxing gloves, and skates. The sunshine without, shone on the backs, where out-riggers and four-oars were pulling up and down the co.e classic muddy waters of the Cam, more celebrated, but far less clear and lovely, I must say, than our old dancing, rapid, joyous Kennet. Everything looked essentially jolly, and jolly did I and my two companions feel, smoking before a huge fire, in the easiest of attitudes and couches, a very trifle seedy from a prolonged Wine the night previous.

One of them was a handsome young fellow of twenty, a great deal too handsome for the peace of the master's daughters, and of the fair *patissières* and *fleuristes* of Petty Cury and King's Parade; the self-same, save some additional feet of height and some fondly-cherished whiskers, as our little Curly of Frestonhills. The other was a man of six-and-twenty, his figure superbly developed in strength and power, without losing one atom in symmetry, showing how his nerve and muscle would tell pulling up stream, or in a fast fifty minutes across country, or, if occasion turned up, in that "noble art of self-defence," now growing as popular in England, as in days of yore at Elis.

"Cram?" he said, looking up as Curly spoke. "Why should you? What's the good of it? Youth is made for something warmer than academic routine; and knowledge of the world will stand a man in better stead than the quarrels of commentators, and the dry demonstrations of mathematicians."

"Of course. Not a doubt about it," said Curly, stretching himself. "I find soda-water and brandy the best guano for the cultivation of *my* intellect, I can tell you, De Vigne."

"Do you think it will get you a double first?"

"Heaven forfend!" cried Curly, with extreme piety. "I've no ambition for lawn sleeves, though they *do* bring with them as neat a little income as any Vessel of Grace, who lives on clover, and forswears the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, can possibly desire."

"*You*'ll live in clover, my boy, trust you for that," said De Vigne. "But you won't pretend that you only take it because you're 'called' to it, and that you would infinitely prefer, if left to yourself, a hovel and dry bread! Don't cram, Curly; your great saps are like the geese they fatten for foie gras; they overfeed one part of the system till all the rest is weak, diseased, and worthless. But the geese have the best of it, for their livers *do* make something worth eating, while the reading-man's brains are rarely productive of anything worth writing."

"Ah!" re-echoed Curly, with an envious sigh of assent. "I wonder whose knowledge is worth the most; my old Coach's, a living miracle of classic research, who couldn't, to save his life, tell you who was Premier, translate '*Comment vous portez-vous?*' or know a Creswick from a Rubens, or yours; who have everything at your fingers' ends that one can want to hear about, from the last clause in the budget to the best make in rifles?"

De Vigne laughed. "Well, a man can't tumble about in the world, if he has any brains at all, without learning something; but, my dear fellow, that's all 'superficial,' they'll tell you; and it is atrociously bad taste to study leading articles instead of Greek unities! *Chacun à son goût*, you know. That young fellow above your head is a mild, spectacled youth, Arthur says, who gives scientific teas, where you give roistering wines, wins Craven scholarships where you get gated, and falls in love with the fair structure of the Œdipus Tyrannus, where you go mad about the unfortunately more perishable form of that pretty little girl at the cigar-shop over the way! You think him a muff, and he, I dare say, looks on you as an *âme damnée*, both in the French and English sense of the words. You both fill up niches in your own little world, you needn't jostle one another. If all horses ran for one Cup only, the turf would soon come to grief. Why ain't you like me? I go on my own way, and never trouble my head about other people!"

"Why am I not like you?" repeated Curly, with a prolonged whistle. "Why isn't water as good as rum punch, or my bed-maker as pretty as little Rosalie? Don't I wish I *were* you, instead of a beggarly younger son, tied by the leg in Granta, bothered with chapel, and all sorts of horrors, and rusticated if I try to see the smallest atom of life. By George! De Vigne, what a jolly time you must have had of it since you left the Chancery!"

"Oh, I don't know," said De Vigne, looking into the fire with a smile. "I've gone the pace, I dare say, as fast as most men, and there are few things I have not tried; but I am not *blasé* yet, thank Heaven! When other things begin to bore me, I turn back to sport—that never palls; there's too much excitement in it. Wine one cannot drink too much of—I can't, at the least—without getting tired of it; women—well, for all the poets write about the joys of constancy, there is no pleasure so great as change *there;* but with a good speat in the river, or clever dogs among the turnips, or a fine fox along a cramped country, a man need never be dull. The ping of a bullet, the shine of a trout's back, never lose their pleasure. One can't say as much for the brightest Rhenish that ever cooled one's throat, nor the brightest glances that ever lured one into folly; though Heaven forbid that I should ever say a word against either!"

"You'd be a very ungrateful fellow if you did," said I, "seeing that you generally monopolise the very best of both!"

He laughed again. "Well I've seen life—I told you young fellows at Frestonhills, I trusted to my *sauce piquante;* and I must say it has used me very well hitherto, and I dare say always will as long as I keep away from the Jews. While a man has plenty of tin, all the world offers him the choicest dinner; though, when he has overdrawn at Coutts's, his friends wouldn't give him dry bread to keep him out of the union! Be able to dine *en prince* at home, and you'll be invited out every night of your life; be hungry *au troisième*, and you must not lick the crumbs from under your sworn allies' tables, those jolly good fellows, who have surfeited themselves at yours many a time. Oh yes, I enjoy life; a man always can as long as he can pay for it!"

With which axiom De Vigne rose from his rocking-chair, laid down his pipe, and stretched himself.

"It looks fine out yonder. Our club think of challenging your University Eight for love, good will, and—a gold cup. We never do anything for *nothing* in England; if we play, we must play for money or ornaments: *I* should like to do the thing for the sake of the fun, but that isn't a general British feeling at all. Money is to us, all that glory was to the Romans, and is to the French. Genius is valued by the money it makes; artists are prized by the price of their pictures. If the nation is grateful, once in a hundred years, it votes—a pension; and if we want to have a good-humoured contest, we must wait till there are subscriptions enough to buy a reward to tempt us! Come along, Arthur, let's have a pull to keep us in practice?"

We accordingly had a pull up that time-honoured stream, where Trinity has so often won challenge cups, and luckless King's got bumped, thanks to its quasi-Etonians' idleness. Where grave philosophers have watched the setting sun die out of the sky, as the glories of their own youth have died away unvalued, till lost for ever. Where ascetic reading-men have mooned along its banks blind to all the loveliness of the water-lily below, or the clouds above, as they took their constitutional and pondered their prize essay. Where thousands of young fellows have dropped down under its trees, dreaming over Don Juan or the Lotus-eaters; or pulled along, straining muscle and nerve against the Head-Boat; or sauntered beside it in sweet midsummer eves with, some fair face upraised to theirs, long forgotten, out of mind now, but which then had power to make them oblivious of proctors and rustication! We pulled along with hearty good-will, aided by an oar with which, could we have had it to help us in the University race, we must have beaten Oxford out-and-out. For the Brocas, and Little Surley, could have told you tales of that long, lofty, slashing stroke; and if, monsieur or madame, you are a "sentimental psychologist," and sneer it down as "animal," let me tell you it is the hand which is strong in sport, and in righteous strife, that will be warmer in help, and firmer in friendship, and more generous in deed than the puny weakling's who cannot hold his own.

"By George!" said De Vigne, resting at last upon his oar, "is there anything that gives one a greater zest in life than bodily exertion?"

A sentiment, however, in which indolent Curly declined to coincide. "Give me," said he, "a lot of cushions, a hookah, and a novel; and your 'bodily exertion' may go to the deuce for me!"

De Vigne laughed; he was not over merciful on the present-day assumption in beardless boys of effeminacy, nil admirari-ism and blasé indifference. He was far too frank himself for affectation, and too spirited for ennui; at the present, at least, his *sauce piquante* had not lost its flavour.

He *had* seen life; he had hunted with the Pytchley, stalked royals in the Highlands, flirted with maids of honour, supped in the Bréda Quartier, had dinners fit for princes at the Star and Garter, and pleasant hours in *cabinets particuliers* at Véfours and the Maison Dorée. He and his yacht, when he had got leave, had gone everywhere that a yacht could go; the Ionian Isles knew no figure-head better than his Aphrodite's of the R.V.Y.S.; it had carried him up to salmon fishing in Norway, and across the Atlantic to hunt buffaloes and cariboos; to Granada, to look into soft Spanish faces by the dim moonlight in the Alhambra; and to Venice, to fling bouquets upwards to the balconies, and whisper to Venetian masks which showed him the glance of long almond eyes, in the riotous Carnival time. He had a brief campaign in Scinde, where he was wounded in the hip, and tenderly nursed by a charming Civil Service widow; where his daring drew down upon him the admiring rebuke of his commanding officer, but won him his troop, which promotion brought him back to England and enabled him to exchange into the —th Lancers, technically the Dashers, the *nom de guerre* of that daring and brilliant corps. And now, De Vigne, who had never lost sight of me since the Frestonhills days, but, on the contrary, had often asked me to go and shoot over Vigne, when he assembled a crowd of guests in that magnificent mansion; having a couple of months' leave, had run down to Newmarket, for the October Meeting; and had come at my entreaty to spend a week in Granta, where, I need not tell you, we fêted him, and did him the honours of the place in style.

"Crash! crash!" went the relentless chapel-bell the next morning, waking us out of dreamless slumber that had endured not much more than an hour, owing to a late night of it with a man at John's over punch and vingt-et-un; and

we had to tumble out of bed and rush into chapel, twisting on our coats and swearing at our destinies, as we went. The Viewaway (the cleverest pack in the easterly counties, though not, I admit, up to the Burton, or Tedworth, or Melton mark) met that day, for the first run of the season, at Euston Hollows, five miles from Cambridge; and Curly, who overcame his laziness on such occasions, staggered into his stall, the pink dexterously covered with his surplice, his bright hair for once in disorder, and his blue eyes most unmistakably sleepy. "Who'd be a hapless undergrad? That fellow De Vigne's dreaming away in comfort, while we're dragged out by the heels, for a lot of confounded humbug and form," lamented Curly to me as we entered; while the readers hurried the prayers over, in that sing-song recitative in favour with collegemen—a cross between the drone of a gnat and the whine of a Suffolk peasant. We dozed comfortably, sitting down, and getting up, at the right times, by sheer force of habit; or read Dumas, or Balzac, under cover of our prayer-books. The freshmen alone tried to look alive and attentive; those better seasoned knew it was but a ritual, much such an empty, but time-honoured one, as the gathering of Fellows at the Signing of the Leases at King's; or any other moss-grown formula of Mater; and attempted no such thing; but rushed out of chapel again, the worse instead of the better for the ill-timed devotions, which forced us, in our thoughtless youth, into irreverence and hypocrisy: a formula as absurd, as soulless, and as sad to see, as the praying windmills of the Hindoos, at which those "heads of the Church," who uphold morning-chapel as the sole safeguard of Granta, smile in pitying derision!

When I got back to my rooms I found breakfast waiting, and De Vigne standing on the hearth-rug. Audit and hare-pie had not much temptation for us that morning! we were soon in the saddle and off to Euston Hollows. After a brisk gallop to cover, we found ourselves riding up the approach to the M.F.H.'s house, where the meet took place in an open sweep of grassland belted with trees, just facing the hall, where were gathered all the men of the Viewaway, mounted on powerful hunters, and looking all over like goers. There was every type of the *genus* sporting man; stout, square farmers, with honest bull-dog physique,

characteristic of John Bull plebeian; wild young Cantabs, mounted showily from livery-stables, with the fair, fearless, delicate features characteristic of John Bull patrician; steady old whippers-in, very suspicious of brandy; wrinkled feeders, with stentorian voices that the wildest puppy had learned to know and dread; the courteous, cordial aristocratic M.F.H., with the men of *his* class, the county gentry; rough, ill-looking cads, awkward at all things save crossing country; no end of pedestrians, nearly run over themselves, and falling into everybody's way; and last, but in our eyes not least, the ladies who had come to see the hounds throw off.

De Vigne exchanged his reeking hack for his own hunter, a splendid thorough-bred, with as much light action, he said, as a danseuse, and as much strength and power as a bargeman. Then we rode up to the M.F.H.'s wife, who was mounted on a beautiful little mare, and intended to follow her husband and his hounds over the Cambridge fences.

"Who is that lady yonder?" asked De Vigne, after he had chatted some moments with her.

"The one on the horse with a white star on his forehead? Lady Blanche Fairelesyeux. Don't you know her? She is a widow, very pretty and very rich."

"Yes, yes, I know Lady Blanche," laughed De Vigne. "She married old Faire two years ago, and persuaded him to drink himself to death most opportunely. No, I meant that very handsome woman there, talking to your husband at this moment, mounted on a chesnut with a very wild eye."

"Oh, that is Miss Trefusis!"

"And can you tell me no more than her mere name?"

"Not much. She is some relation—what I do not know exactly—of that detestable old woman Lady Fantyre, whose 'recollections' of court people are sometimes as gross anachronisms as the Comte de St. Germain's. They are staying with Mrs. St. Croix, and she brought them here; but I do not like Miss Trefusis very much myself, and Mr. L'Estrange does not wish me to cultivate her acquaintance."

"Then I must not ask you to introduce me?" said De Vigne, disappointedly.

"Oh yes, if you wish. I know her well enough for that; and she dines here to-night with the St. Croix. But there is a wide difference, you know, between making passing acquaintances, and ripening them into friends. Come, Captain de Vigne, I am sure you will ride the hounds off the scent, or do something dreadful, if I do not let you talk to your new beauty," laughed the young mistress of Euston Hollows, turning her mare's head towards the showy chesnut, whose rider had won so much of De Vigne's admiration.

She was as dashing and magnificent in her way as her horse in his, with a tall and voluptuously-perfect figure, which her tight dark riding-jacket showed in all the beauty of its rounded outlines, while her little hat, with a single white feather, scarcely shadowed, and did not conceal, her clear profile, magnificent eyes, and lips by which Velasquez or Titian would have sworn. Splendid she was, and she had spared no pains to make the tableau; and though to a keen eye her brilliant colour which was *not* rouge, and her pencilled eyebrows, which *were* tinted, gave her a trifle of the actress or the lorette style, there was no wonder that De Vigne, impressible as a Southern by women's beauty—and at that time as long as it was beauty, not caring much of what stamp or of what order—was not easy till Flora L'Estrange had introduced him to her. So we rush upon our doom! So we, in thoughtless play, twist the first gleaming and silky threads of the fatal cord which will cling about our necks, fastened beyond hope of release, as long as our lives shall last!

The Trefusis (as she was called in the smoking-rooms), surrounded as she was by the best men of the Viewaway, ruling them by force of that superb form and face, bowed very graciously to De Vigne, and smiled upon him. He had caught her eyes once or twice before he had asked Mrs. L'Estrange who she was; and now, displacing the others with that calm, unconscious air of superiority, the more irritating to his rivals that it was invariably successful, he leaned his hand on the pommel of her saddle, and talked away to her the chit-chat of the hour. The Trefusis intended to follow the hounds, as well as L'Estrange's wife and Lady Blanche Fairelesyeux; so De Vigne and she rode off together as the hounds, symmetrical in form, and all in

good condition, though they *were* a provincial establishment, trotted away, with waving sterns and eager eyes, to draw the Euston Hollows covert.

The cheery "Halloo!" rang over coppice and brushwood and plantation; the white sterns of the hounds flourished among the dark-brown bushes of the cover; stentorian lungs shouted out the "Stole away!—hark for-r-r-r-rard!" and as the finest fox in the county broke away, De Vigne struck his spurs into his hunter's flanks, and rattled down the cover, all his thoughts centered on the clever little pack that streamed along before him; while the whole field burst over the low pastures and oak fences and ox-rails, across which the fox was leading us. I dashed along the first three meadows, which were only divided by low hedges, with all the excitement and breathlessness of a first start; but as we crossed the fourth at an easy gallop, cooling the horses before the formidable leap which we knew the Cam, or rather a narrow sedgy tributary of it, would give us at the bottom, I took time, and looked around. Before any of us, De Vigne was going along, as straight as an arrow's flight, working his bay up for the approaching trial; never looking back, going into the sport before him as if he never had had, and never could have had, any other interest in life. The Trefusis, riding as few women could, sitting well down in her saddle, like any of the Pytchley or Belvoir men, was some yards behind him, "riding jealous," I could see; rather a hopeless task for a young lady with a man known in the hunting-field as he was. The M.F.H. was, of course, handling his hunter in masterly style, his little wife keeping gallantly up with him, though she and her mare looked as likely to be smashed by the first staken-bound fence as a Sèvres figure or a Parian statuette. Curly, who, thanks to his half-broken hunter, had split four strong oak bars, and been once pitched neck and crop into Cambridge mud, was coming along with his pink sadly stained; while Lady Blanche and four of the men were within a few paces of him, and the rest of the field were scattered far and wide: quaint bits of scarlet, green, and black, dotting the short brown turf of the pasture lands.

Splash! went the fox into the sedgy waters of this branch of classic Cam, and scrambled up upon the opposite bank. For a second the hounds lost the scent; then, they threw

up their heads with a joyous challenge, breasted the stream, dashed on after him, and sped along beyond the pollards on the opposite side far ahead of us, streaming out like the white tail of a comet. De Vigne put his bay at the leap, but before he could lift him over, the Trefusis cleared it, with unblanched cheek and unshaken nerve. She looked back with a laugh, not of gay girlish merriment, such as Flora L'Estrange would have given, but a laugh with a certain gratified malice in it; and he gave a muttered oath at being "cut down" by a woman as he landed his bay beside her.

I cleared it, so did the M.F.H., and, by some species of sporting miracle, so did his wife and her little mare. One of the yeomen found a watery bed among the tadpoles, clay and rushes—it might be a watery grave, for anything I know to the contrary—and poor dear Curly was tumbled straight off his young one, and lay there, a helpless mass of human and equine flesh, while Lady Blanche lifted her roan over him, with a gay, unsympathising "Keep still, or Mazeppa will damage you!"

The run had lasted but ten minutes and a half as yet, and the hounds, giving tongue in joyous concert, led the way for those who could follow them, over blackthorn hedges, staken-bound fences, and heavy ploughed lands, while the fox was heading for Sifton Wood, where once lodged, we should never unearth him again. On we went at a killing pace; De Vigne leading the first flight, by two lengths, up to a cramped and awkward leap; a high, stiff, straggling hedge, with a double ditch, almost as wide as a Leicestershire bullfinch. Absorbed as I was in working up my hunter for the leap, I looked to see if the Trefusis funked it. Not she!—and she cleared it, too, lifting her chesnut high in the air, over the ugly blackthorn boughs; but on the slippery marshy ground the horse fell, heavily and awkwardly, flinging her forward; so at least they told me afterwards. The courtly M.F.H. stopped to offer her assistance, but she waved him on; De Vigne had forgotten all his chivalry, and led straight ahead without looking back; while picking up her hunter, the Trefusis remounted, nothing daunted by her fall. Lady Blanche's Mazeppa refused to leap; and with a little petulant French oath, she rode further down, to try and find a gap; while my

have no doubt, because she had no balance at any bank save Homburg and Baden, and was obliged to live by her wits, those wits being represented by the four honours and the odd trick. If poor old Fantyre had had a half-million or so at Barclay's, I dare say the charitable world would have let her buy oblivion for all the naughty secrets hidden in her old wigged head.

"Diana turned to Venus, and no mistake," whispered Curly to me, as we looked at the Trefusis, her beauty heightened by her toilette, which was as tasteful as a Parisienne's, and would have chimed in with M. Chevreul's artistic notions. De Vigne, the moment he entered crossed over to her, and, seating himself, began to talk. Whether the lustrous gaze of his eyes, which knew how to express their admiration, got their admiration returned; or whether she had wit enough to appreciate his conversation, where the true gold of sense, and talent, rang out in distinction to the second-hand platitudes, or *Punch*-cribbed mots, of the generality of people, I will not pretend to decide. At any rate, by some spell or other, he distanced his rivals by many lengths.

They naturally spoke of the run of that morning, and the Trefusis, flirting her fan with stately movement, and turning her full glittering eyes upon him, asked very softly, "What do you think you did this morning that pleased me?"

De Vigne expressed his happiness that any act of his should do so.

"It was when we took that ditch by Sifton Wood, and my stupid chesnut fell with me. You rode on, and never looked back; your thoughts were with the hounds, not with me!"

"You are more forgiving to my discourtesy than I can be to myself," smiled De Vigne. "What you are so generous as to pardon I cannot recall without shame."

"Then you are very silly," she interrupted him. "A man in a time of excitement or danger should have something better to think about than a woman."

"It is difficult, with Miss Trefusis before us, to think there *can* be anything better than a woman," whispered De Vigne.

She looked at him and smiled, too; with something of

malice in it as when she had cleared the Cam before him—a smile that at once repulsed, and fascinated; annoyed and piqued him. Just then dinner was announced as served. L'Estrange took away my bewildering Countess of Turquoise; Curly led in Julia St. Croix, with whom he seemed wonderfully struck, Heaven knows why, except that young fellows will go down before any battered or war-worn arrows at times; and De Vigne gave his arm to the Trefusis, to whom he talked during all the courses with a devotion which must have interfered with his proper appreciation of the really masterly productions of the Euston Hollows *chef*, and the very excellent hock and claret of L'Estrange's cellar. Whether he had much response I cannot say—for I was absorbed in looking at Lady Turquoise from far too respectful a distance to please me: but I should fancy not, for the Trefusis was never, that I heard, much famed for conversation; still someway or other she fascinated him with her basilisk-beauty, and when Flora gave the move she looked into his eyes rather warmly for an acquaintance not twelve hours old as yet. We were some little time before we followed them, for De Vigne and the Members got on the Reform Bill, and did not get off it again in a hurry; and though Lady Turquoise was bewitching, and the Trefusis' eyes magnificent, and the St. Croix very effective as they sang duets in studied poses, Château Margaux and unfettered talk proved more attractive to us. When we returned to the drawing-room, however, De Vigne took up his station beside the Trefusis again, paying her marked attention, while Flora L'Estrange sang charming little French *chansons*, and Julia St. Croix tortured us with bravuras, and the cruel Countess of Turquoise flirted with the county Member. What an intolerably empty-headed coxcomb, he seemed to *me*, I remember!

"What a fine creature that Trefusis is!" said De Vigne, as he drove us back to Cambridge in a dog-cart. "On my life, she is a magnificent woman! Arthur, she reminds me of somebody or other—I can't tell whom—somebody, I dare say, I saw in Spain or in Italy, or in India, perhaps."

"Shall I tell you?" said Curly.

"Yes, pray do; but you've never been about with me, old boy, how should you know?"

"I was with you at the Chancery, and I haven't forgotten Lucy Davis"

"The Davis!" exclaimed De Vigne, the light of old days breaking in upon him, half faded, half familiar. "By Jove! she is something like that girl; I declare I had forgotten that schoolboy episode, Curly. So she *is* like her,—if Lucy had been a lady instead of a dressmaker. The deuce! I hadn't bad taste then, boy as I was! How many things of that kind one forgets——"

"Lucy didn't look like a woman who'd allow herself to be forgotten. She'd make you remember her by fair means or foul," said Curly

"What! do you recollect her so well, young one?" laughed De Vigne. "I must say, she seems to have made more impression upon you, than she has done on me. There was the very devil in that girl, poor thing, young as she was! She was bold, bad, hardened to the core. But this Trefusis, Curly!—she does bring that girl to my mind, certainly, and there is in her something there was in Lucy Davis—a something intangible which repels, while her exterior beauty allures one. Perhaps it is in both alike—a cold heart within."

"If we were only lured where there are warm hearts, we should keep in a blessed state of indifference," said I, thinking savagely of Lady Turquoise and that confounded county Member.

"Hallo, Arthur! what has turned you cynic?" laughed De Vigne. "Only this very morning you were sentimentalising over the 'Lady of Shalott,' and wanting to inflict it on me!"

"Yes, and you stopped me with the abominable quotation, 'Ass, am I *onion*-eyed?' I say, De Vigne, I wish you'd tell us how that affair with Lucy Davis ended? Curly and I saw you quarrelling the day before you left."

"I never quarrelled!" said De Vigne, contemptuously. "I never do with anybody; if they don't say what I like, I tell them my mind at once, and there's an end of it. But I never quarrel! I met Lucy that evening as I was going into Frestonhills, and when I told her I was about to leave, she demanded—what do you think?—nothing less than a promise of marriage! Only fancy—from *me* to *her!* She even said I had made her one! I've been guilty of many mad things, but never of one quite so insane as that. I told her flatly it was a lie—so it was, and it put me in a

passion to be saddled with such an atrocious falsehood; I never can stand quiet and see people trying to chisel me, you know. I offered to do anything she liked for her; to provide for her as liberally as she chose. But not a word would she hear from me; she was mad, I suppose, because she could not startle or chicane me into admitting the promise of marriage, having possibly in her eye the heavy damages an enlightened court would grant to her 'innocent years' and her 'wrongs!' At any rate, she would not hear a word I said, but she poured her invectives into my ear, letting out that she had never loved me, but had intended to make me a stepping stone to the money, and the rank, she was always pining after; that, having failed, she hated me, and that before she died, would be revenged."

"By George! what an amusing idea. She'd be puzzled to do it, I fancy."

"Rather," laughed De Vigne, reining up his mare; "but women say anything in a passion. Lucy Davis had gone straight out of my mind, till you said that handsome Trefusis made you think of her. I am glad the St. Croix and L'Estranges are coming to lunch with you, Curly; I want to see more of my imperial beauty; and I must be back at Vigne by Saturday. Sabretasche, and Pigott, and Severn, and no end of men are coming down for the pheasants; I wish you were, too, old fellows! Good night; *Au revoir!*" And De Vigne set us down before Trinity, and drove on to the Bull; smoking, and thinking, very likely, of his superb Trefusis.

Oh, those jolly Cambridge days; the splendid manner in which we bumped Corpus and Katherine Hall, and carried off the Cup, to the envy of all the University; the style in which we thrashed the Exeter Eight, with ignominy unspeakable, before the eyes of Henley; the row and scuffle of Town and Gown rows, dear to the British passion for hard hits, where Curly knocked a cobbler down and then gave him in charge for an assault; the skill with which that mischievous young Honourable caught his whip round the shovel hat of a dean, raising that venerated article of dress in mid-air, and only escaping rustication by dashing on with his tandem-team too quickly for identification: were they not all written, in their day, among the records of Trinity men's larks?

We used to vow we were confoundedly tired of Grants, and so I dare say we might feel at the time: but how pleasant they were, those light-hearted college days!—the honours of the Eight-oar; the thrashing of the Marylebone Eleven; the rattle cross country, for the Cesarewitch, or the Cambridge Sweepstakes; the flirtations of pretty shop-girls in Petty Cury, or Trumpington-street; the raving politics of the Union, occasional prelude to triumphs, forensic and senatorial; the noisy wines, where scanty humour woke more merriment than wittiest *mots* do twenty years after; and Cambridge port passed with a flavour, that no olives or anchovies can give to Comet claret now. How pleasant they were, those jolly college days! As I think of them, many kindly faces and joyous voices rise before me! Where are they all? Some lying with the colours on their breast beside the Euxine Sea, and along the line of the Pacific; some struck down by the assassin's knife in the temples at Cawnpore; some sleeping between the sighing of the Delhi palms, or of the sad Atlantic waves; some wasting classic eloquence on country hinds, in moss-grown village churches; some fighting the great fight, between science and death, in the crowded hospital-wards of London; some wearing honour, and honesty, and truth from their hearts, in the breathless, up-hill press of the great world; —all of them, living or dead scattered far away over the earth, since those old days, in the shadow of the academic walls!

The time to lionise Cambridge, as everybody knows, is May and June, when the backs are all in their glory: when the graceful spires of King's rise up against blue skies; when the white towers of John's stand bosomed in green leafy shades; when the Trinity limes fill the air with fragrance, and the sun peers through the great shadowy elm-boughs, of Neville's Court; and the brown Cam flows under its bridges, with water-lilies and forget-me-nots on its breast, gliding, as though conscious that it was in classic shades, through vistas of waving boughs, and past gray, stately college walls; bringing into the grave haunts of Learning, the glad and vernal freshness of the Spring. May is the time for Cambridge; still, even in October, we managed to give the L'Estranges, and the St. Croix, a very good reception. Women are always royally received by

Cantabs, and our guests were calculated to excite the envy of all the University. We did the lions with very little architectural appreciation; but the science of eyes and smiles, is a pleasanter one than the science of styles and orders; and we were quite as contented, and I have no doubt much better amused, than if, Ruskin *à la main*, we had been competent to pull to pieces the beauty of King's, and prate of "severity" and "purity." Happy in our barbarianism, we crossed the Bridge of Sighs with a laugh at old Fantyre's jokes; strolled down the Fellowship Walk, telling Julia St. Croix, who had not two ideas in her head, that Bacon's Gate would, to a surety, fall down on her; went in at Humility, through Virtue, and out at Honour, flirting desperately under those grave archways; and hurried irreverently through the libraries, where reading-men, cramming in niches, looked up, forgetting their studies at the rustle of Lady Blanche's silk flounces, and Thorwaldsen's "Byron" seemed to glance with Juanesque admiration at the superb eye of the Trefusis, as she lifted them to that statue; which does, indeed, as the poet himself averred, make a shocking nigger of him.

"How strange it seems to me," said De Vigne, as entering King's Chapel, we brushed against one of the senior Fellows, who had dozed away in college chambers all the prime of his life—"how incomprehensible, that men can pass a whole existence, in the sort of chrysalis state of which one sees so much in Universities. That muff is a Kingsman; he obtained his fellowship by right, his degree without distinction. He lives on, fuddling his brains—which he has never worked since he got his Eaton captaincy—with port, and playing solemn rubbers, and eating heavy dinners, till a living falls as fat as his avarice desires. He has no thoughts, no ambition, no sphere beyond the academic pale."

"And no love, I dare say, save audit, and no mistress save turtle-soup," laughed Flora L'Estrange.

"Perhaps he had once, one whom the selfish creeds of the Fellowship system parted from him long ago," said Curly, with a tender glance at that very practical-minded flirt, Julia St. Croix.

"That's right, Curly," said De Vigne, amusedly, "make a romance of it. Fellows of colleges, with snuff, and whist and dry routine, are such appropriate subjects for sentiment!

But after all, Miss Trefusis, that man is not a greater marvel to me than one of those classical scholars, who is nothing *but* a classical scholar, such as one meets here and in Oxford, binding down his ambitions to the elucidation of a dead tongue, exhausting his energies in the evolving of decayed philosophies, spending, as Pelham says, 'one long school-day of lexicons and grammars,' his memory the charnel-house for the bones of a lifeless language, his brain enacting the mechanical *rôle* of a dictionary or an encyclopædia, living all his life, without human aspirations or human sympathies, and in his death leaving no void among men, not missed even by a dog."

"It would not suit you?" asked the Trefusis, smiling.

"No, no," chuckled the old Fantyre to herself, "he'll have his pleasure, I take it, cost him what it may."

"*I!*" echoed De Vigne, "chained down to the limits of a commentator's studies; or a Hellenist's labours! Heaven forbid! I love excitement, action, change; a mill-wheel monotony would be the death of me. I would rather have storms to encounter, than no movement to keep me alive."

"Are you so changeable, then?"

'Well, yes!—I fancy I am. At least, I never met anything that could chain me long as yet."

He laughed as he spoke, leaning against one of the stalls the sun streaming through the rich stained glass full upon his face, and his dark lustrous eyes, gleaming with amusement, at a thousand reminiscences evoked by her speech. The Trefusis looked at him with a curious smile, perhaps of longing to chain the restless and wayward spirit, perhaps of pique at his careless words, perhaps of resolve to conquer and to win him; it might have been hate, but—it certainly was not love! Still Flora L'Estrange whispered to her husband:

"She will marry him if she can."

L'Estrange laughed and looked at Granville and his companion, as they were (in appearance) discussing the subjects of the storied windows of Holy Henry's chapel, but talking, I fancy, of other topics than sacred art or history.

"Quite right, my pet, but I hope she *won't*. I would as soon see him marry a tigress!"

Tired of lionizing, we soon returned to Curly's rooms, where the best luncheon which could be had out of Cambridge shops and Trinity buttery, with London wine, and game

from his governor's preserves, was ready for us. Curly never did anything without doing it well, and his rooms were, I think, the most luxurious in all Granta, with his grand piano, his bronzes, and his landscapes, mixed up with tobacco-pots, boxing-gloves, pipes, and portraits of ballet pets, and heroes of the Turf and the P.R. The luncheon was as merry as it was lavish—what college meal, with fast, pretty women at the board, ever was not?—and while the Badminton and champagne-cup went round, and the gyp waited as solemnly and dreadfully as gyps ever do, on like occasions, a cross-fire of wit and fun and nonsense, shot across the table, and mingled with the perfume of Curly's hothouse bouquets, enough to bring the stones of time-honoured Trinity about our irreverent heads. De Vigne, in very high spirits, laughed and talked with all the brilliance for which society had distinguished him; Flora and Lady Blanche were always full of mischievous repartee; Curly and Julia St. Croix flirted so desperately, that if it had not been for the publicity of the scene, I believe the boy would have gone straight away into a proposal. Lady Fantyre, especially when the claret-cup had gone round freely, was so amusing that we forgot she was old, and the Trefusis, if she did not contribute equally to the conversation, sat beside De Vigne, darting glances at him from her large Spanish eyes, and looking handsome enough to be inspiration to anybody.

"So you leave Cambridge to-morrow?" she said, as they were waiting for the St. Croix carriage to take them home again.

"Yes. If *you* were going to remain I should stay too; but Mrs. St. Croix tells me you leave on Monday," said De Vigne, in a low tone, with an admiring glance, to which few women would have been insensible.

She looked at him with that cold, malicious smile, which had I been he, would have made me very careful of that woman.

"It is easy to say that, when, as I *am* going on Monday I cannot put you to the test!"

"I never trouble myself to say what I do not mean, Miss Trefusis."

She laughed; she had found she had power to pique him!

"Then will you come and see me in town after Christmas?"

What he answered I know not, but I dare say it was in the affirmative; he would hardly have refused anything to such a glance as she gave him. He lingered beside their carriage, and when it rolled away, stood in the Trinity gateway with a smile on his lips, twisting in his fingers a white azalea she had given him. But, two hours after, the flower was thrown into the college grate, and the bedmaker swept it out with the cinders! So he was not very far gone as yet.

The next morning, after we had "done chapel," De Vigne, who had sent on his groom, hunters, and luggage the day before, walked down to the station, and we with him.

"I wish you two fellows were coming to Vigne with me," he said, as he went along. "You don't know what a bore it is having a place like that! So much is expected of one. You belong to the county, and the county makes you feel the relationship pretty keenly, too. You must fill the house in the Recesses. You must hear horrible long speeches from your tenantry, wishing you health and happiness, while you're wishing them at the devil. You must have confounded interviews with your steward, who looks frightfully glum at the pot of money that has been dropped over the Goodwood, and hints at the advisability of cutting down the very clump of oaks that makes the beauty of the drawing-room view. Then, worst of all, you're expected to hunt your own county, even though it be as unfit as the Wash or the Black Forest, while you're longing to be with the Burton or Tedworth, following Tom Smith, or Tom Edge, or Pytchley men, who don't funk at every bullfinch!"

"Do you hunt the Vigne pack, then, always?" asked Curly.

"I? No. I never said I *did* all those things. I only said they are expected of me, and it's tiresome to say no."

"Then you must make love to the Trefusis, if you don't like 'No,' for her eyes say, 'Do do it,' as clearly as eyes can speak."

He laughed. "Yes. I must admit she doesn't look a very impregnable citadel."

"Not if you make it worth her while to surrender?"

"None of them surrender for nothing," said De Vigne, smiling. "With some, it's cashmeres; with others, yellow boys; with some, it's position; with others, a wedding-ring.

I can't see much difference myself, though I'd give cashmeres in plenty, and should be remarkably sorry to be chiselled into settlements."

"I should fancy so," said Curly; "only think of the annihilation of larks, liberty, fun, claret, latchkeys, oyster suppers, B. and S., and Bals Masqués, expressed in those two doomed words, 'a married man!' To my mind, marrying's as bad as hanging, and equally puts a finish to all life worth supporting!"

"Did you tell Julia your views, Curly?" asked De Vigne, quietly.

"Pooh! stuff! What's Julia to do with me? the girl at the Cherryhinton public, is a vast lot better-looking," muttered Curly, with an embarrassment that made me doubt if the limes of Trinity had not heard different opinions enunciated with regard to the Holy Bond.—*N.B.* Julia St. Croix that day three months, tied herself to that same snuffy, portly, wine-embalmed Fellow, she had laughed at with us, in King's chapel. To be sure he had then become rector of Snooze-cum-Rest; and when Ruth goes to woo Boaz, we may always be pretty certain she knows he is master of the harvest, and has the golden wheat-ears in her eye, sweet innocent little dear though she look.

"The Cherryhinton public? I see—that's why skittles and beer have become suddenly delightful," laughed De Vigne.

"Why not?" asked Curly, meekly. "Skittles are no sin, and malt and hops are man's natural aliment; and as for barmaids! why, if one's denied houris and nectar, one must take to Jane and bitter beer, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Don't know," said De Vigne. "I prefer Quartier Bréda and Champagne. As Balzac says, '*Une femme, belle comme Galatée ou Helène, ne pourrait me plaire tant soit peu qu'elle soit crottée*;'"

"You forgot that once—you didn't repudiate Lucy Davis?"

"Lucy was half a lady, in dress at least," laughed De Vigne, "and she got up uncommonly well, too; however, that was in my schoolboy days. After philosophies and problems a kitchen-maid is pardonable; and as for the young woman who presides over the post office, or the oyster-patties, she is perfectly irresistible! The *laissez-aller* of the Paphian

Temple, as the fine writers say, is so delightful after the stiff stoicism of the Porch!"

"Well, thank Heaven, the Paphian Temple is built everywhere," said Curly, "and you find it under the taps of XXX, as well as in the gilt walls of a Bréda boudoir; or the poor wretches who haven't the Bréda gold key, would get locked into very outer darkness indeed! Here's the train just starting. By Jove! that's lucky! All right, old fellow. Here's Puck; tumble in old boy."

And the "old boy" being "tumbled in" (he was a wiry blue terrier), De Vigne seated himself, and was rolled off en route to Vigne with a pretty brunette opposite him, who seemed imbued with extreme admiration of the terrier or—his master. Girls always begin by calling his children "little loves" to a widower, though the brats be as ugly as sin; and by admiring his dog to a bachelor, though frightened to death it should snap at them!

Curly and I saw the train off and walked back to Granta, to console ourselves, first with billiards and beer at Brown's, then with some hard practice on the river.

Eheu! fugaces! . . . . . I belong to the Blue Jersey B.C., the first in England; but somehow I don't feel the zest now that I used to feel, with "Time, Five!" "Well pulled, Five!" in my ear from our stroke (poor fellow! he went down with jungle fever, and is lying in the banyan shadows, in Ceylon sand), and the shrill imperious shrieking, as the speed and bottom of Oxford told against us, of that wicked little dog Hervey, our Coxwain (*he's* a bishop now, and hush-hushes you, and strokes his apron, if you whisper the smallest crumb of fun over his capital Comet wine). Dear old Cambridge! I wouldn't give a straw for a Cambridge man who didn't grow prolix as he talked, or wrote of her, and didn't empty a bumper of Guinness's or Moët—as his taste may lie—in her honour. A man may read, or he may not read, at college. I prefer the boy who knows how to feather his oar, to one who only knows Latin quantities and Greek unities; but at any rate, whether he get first classes or not, he will find his level, measure his weight, and learn—unless he be obtuse indeed—that through college life, as through all other life, the best watchwords are Pluck, and Honour!

*I* learnt that much at least, and it is no mean lesson,

though I must admit that, after having had my cross taken away, been gated times innumerable, having done all the books of Virgil by way of penance (paying little Crib, my wine-merchant's son, to write them out for me), and been shown up before the proctor on no less than six separate occasions, I got rusticated in my fourth term, and finally took my name off the books. The governor laughed, preferred the Pewter I had to show, and my share in winning the Challenge Cup, to any Bell's or Craven's scholarships, and paid my debts without a murmur. Too good to be true, you will say, *ami lecteur?* No; there *are* fathers who can remember they have been young; though they are unspeakably rare—as rare as ladies who can let you forget it!

Now came the question, what should I do? "Nothing," the correct thing, according to the governor. "Stand for the county," my mother suggested. "Go as attaché to my cousin, the envoy to St. Petersburg," my relatives opined, who had triumphed, with much unholy glory, over my rustication, as is the custom of relatives from time immemorial. As it chanced, I had no fancy for either utter *dolce* the bray of St. Stephen's, or the snows of Russia, so I put down my name for a commission. We had plenty of interest to push it, and the "Gazette" soon announced, "—th P. O. Lancers, Arthur Vane Tierney Chevasney, to be Cornet, *vice* James Yelverton, promoted;" and the —th, always known in the service as the Dashers, was De Vigne's regiment, my old Frestonhills hero.

The Dashers were then quartered at Kensington and Hounslow, and the first person I saw as I drove through Knightsbridge was De Vigne's groom, Harris, riding a powerful thorough-bred, swathed in body-clothing, whom I recognized as the bay of the Euston Hollows run. As soon as my interview with the Adjutant and the Colonel were over, I found out De Vigne's rooms speedily. He had the drawing-room floor of a house in Kensington Gore, well furnished, and further crowded with crowds of things of his own, from Persian carpets bought in his travels, to the last new rifle sent home only the day before. I made my way up unannounced, and stood a minute or two in the open doorway. They were pleasant rooms, just as a man likes to have them, with all the things he wants about him, ready to his hand; no madame to make him miserable by putting his

pipes away out of sight, and no housekeeper to drive him distracted by sorting his papers, and introducing order among his pet lumber. A setter, a retriever, and a couple of Skyes, were on the hearthrug, (veritable tiger-skin); breakfast, in dainty Sèvres, and silver, stood on one table, sending up an aroma of coffee, omelettes, and devils; the morning papers lay on the floor, a smoking cap was hung on a Parian Venus; a parrot, who apparently considered himself master of the place, was perched irreverently on a bronze Milton, and pipes, whips, pistols, and cards, were thrown down on a Louis Quinze couch, that Louise de Kérouaille or Sophie Arnould might have graced. From the inner room came the rapid clash of small-swords, while "*Touche, touche, touche! riposte! hola!*" was shouted, in a silvery voice, from a man who, lying back in a rocking-chair in the bay-window of the front room, was looking on at a bout with the foils that was taking place beyond the folding-doors. The two men who were fencing were De Vigne and a smaller, slighter fellow; the one calm, cool, steady, and never at a disadvantage, the other, skilful indeed, but too hot, eager, and rapid: for in fencing, whether with the foils or the tongue, the grand secret is to be cool, since, in proportion to your tranquility, grows your opponent's exasperation! The man in the bay-window was too deeply interested to observe me, so I waited patiently till De Vigne had sent his adversary's foil flying from his hand.

He turned with one of his sunny smiles:

"Ah! dear old fellow, how are you? Charmed to see you. This is the best move you ever made, Arthur. Mr. Chevasney, Colonel Sabretasche, M. de Cheffontaine, a trio of my best friends. We only want Curly to make the *partie carrée* perfect. Sit down, old boy; we have just breakfasted, I am sorry to say, but here are the things, and you shall soon have some hot chocolate and fresh côtelettes."

While he talked he forced me into an arm-chair, and disregarding all my protests that I had already breakfasted twice—once at Longholme, and once at a station—rang for his man. De Cheffontaine, a French attaché, flung himself on a sofa, and began with a *mot* on his own defeat; the fellow in the bay-window got lazily out of his rocking-chair and strolled over to us. De Vigne took his meerschaum, and we were soon talking away as hard as we could, of the

belles of that season, the pets of the ballet, Richmond, the Spring Meetings, the best sales in the Yard, the last matches at Lord's, the chances of Heliotrope's being scratched, the certainty that Vane Stevens's roan filly would lose the trotting-match, with other like topics of the Town and the Hour. Sabretasche was, I found, a Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel, and Major of the Dashers, and a most agreeable man he seemed, lying back in his chair, making us laugh at witticisms which he spoke, quietly and indolently, in a soft, low, mellow voice. Had I been a woman that beautiful face would have done for me irretrievably, as, according to report, it had done for a good many. Reckless devil-may-care, the man looked, the recklessness of one who heeds nothing in heaven or earth; a little hardened by the world and its rubs, rendered cynical, perhaps, by injustice and wrong; but in the eyes there lay a kindness, and in the mouth a sadness which betokened better things. He might have been thirty, five-and-thirty, forty. One could no more tell his age than his character, though, looking at him, one could fancy it true what the world said of him—that no man ever found so faithful a friend, and no woman so faithless a lover, as in Vivian Sabretasche.

"Chevasney, who do you think is one of the reigning beauties up here?" asked De Vigne, pushing me some cubas.

"How should I know? The Cherryhinton barmaid?"

"Don't be a fool."

"The Trefusis, then?"

"Of course. She is still living with that abominable old Irish woman. They're in Bruton-street;—a pleasant house, only everybody wonders where the Peeress finds the needful. They give uncommonly agreeable receptions. Don't they, Sabretasche?"

"Oh, very!" answered the Colonel, with an enigmatical smile, "especially to you, I've no doubt; and the only tax levied on one for the entertainment is to pay a few compliments to mademoiselle, and a few guinea points to my lady. I can't say all the guests are the best ton; there are too many ladies designated by the definite article, and too many gentlemen with cordons in their button-holes; but they know how to amuse one another, and the women, if not exclusive, are at least remarkable pretty. The Trefusis is more than pretty, especially smoking a cigarette. Shall

Look here, Arthur, at this 'Challenge.' That man yonder did it. Isn't he a clever fellow—too good to lie still in a rocking chair, and talk about women?"

I looked at the "Challenge"—a little marble statuette from Landseer's picture: and product of the Colonel's chisel. It was really a wonderful little thing; every minutia, even each fine point of the delicate antlers, being most beautifully and perfectly finished.

'How immensely jolly to have such talent!" said I involuntarily expressing my honest admiration. "What a resource it must be—what a refuge when other things pall?"

He smiled at my enthusiasm, and raised his eyebrows.

"*Cui bono?*" he said softly, as he rose and pushed back his chair.

The man interested me; and when he and the Baron were gone, I asked De Vigne what he knew of him, as we stood waiting for his tilbury, to go and call in Bruton-street.

"Of Vivian Sabretasche? I know much of him socially, little of himself; and of his history—if history he have—nothing. He is excessively kind to me; honourable and generous in all his dealings; a gentleman always. More of him I know not, nor, were we acquainted ten years, should I at the end, I dare say, know more."

"Why?"

"Why? For this reason—that nobody does. Hollingsworth and he were cornets together; yet Hollingsworth is as much a stranger to the real man as you or I. There are some fellows, you know, who don't wear their hearts on their sleeves; he is one, I am another. Men are like snowballs: to begin with, it's a piece of snow, soft and pure and malleable, and easily enough melted; but the snowball soon gets kicked about and mixed up with other snow, and knocked against stones and angles, and hurried, and shoved, and pushed along till, in sheer self-defence, it hardens itself into a solid, impenetrable, immovable block of ice!"

"Nonsense! *You* are not that."

"Not yet, thank God!"

I should say he was not! The passionate blood of six and-twenty, was more likely to be at boiling point than at zero.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A SUBTLE POISON DRUNK IN THE CHAMPAGNE AT AN OPERA SUPPER.

VERY good style was the Bruton-street house, and very good style the Trefusis, with the rose light falling on her from the window, where she was surrounded by plants, and birds in cages and on stands, with a little fellow of the Guards, and a courtly French exile, lounging away their morning there.

She looked up with a smile of conscious power, gave her hand tenderly to De Vigne, with a full sweep of her superb eyes under their thick fringes; bent her head to me, and put her Pomeranian dog on his knee. Old Lady Fantyre was there playing propriety, if Propriety could ever be persuaded to let herself be represented by that hook-nosed, disreputable, detestable, amusing old woman, who sat working away at the tapestry-frame, with her gold spectacles on, occasionally lifting up her little keen brown eyes, and mingling in the conversation, telling the old tale of "*ma jeunesse*," of the Bath and the Wells, of Ombre and Quadrille, Sheridan and Selwyn, Talleyrand and Burke, "old Q." and Lady Coventry.

"I remember you at Cambridge, Mr. Chevasney, and our merry luncheon too," said the Trefusis, as if Cambridge belonged to some dim era of her childhood, which it was astonishing she could recall at all.

"What! my dear," burst in Lady Fantyre, "you don't mean to say you remember all your acquaintances, do you? If so, ye'll have enough to do."

"Certainly not. But when they are as agreeable as Mr. Chevasney——"

"Of course—of course. *Les présents ont toujours raison*," continued the Viscountess, in her lively treble, "as true, by the way, that is, as its twin maxim, *Les absents ont toujours tort;* it would be hard, indeed, if we might not tell tales of our friends when they couldn't hear us! But I know we used to give cuts by the dozen. I remember walking down the Birdcage Walk with Selwyn (poor dear Selwyn, ther

isn't his like in this day; I remember him so well, though I was but a little chit then!) and a man, a very personable man, too—but Lord! my dear, not one of us—came up and reminded George he had known him in Bath. What do you think Selwyn did, my dear? Why, stared him in the face, of course, and said, 'Well, sir, in Bath I may possibly know you again.'"

"That beats Brummel, when a lady apologised for keeping him so long standing by her carriage: 'My dear lady, there is no one to see it!'" said De Vigne, laughing.

"Abominable!" cried the Trefusis. "If I had been that woman, I would have told him I had made sure of that, or I would not have hazarded my reputation by speaking to him!"

"Brummel would have been very willing to have been seen with *you*," said De Vigne, fixing his eyes on her, and he knew pretty well how to make his eyes talk.

"There's not one of you men now-a-days like Selwyn," began the old *raconteuse* again, while the Trefusis bent her stately head to her boy Guardsman, and De Vigne balanced his cane thoughtfully on the Pomeranian's nose. "You talk of your great wit, Lord John Bonmot, why he hasn't as much wit in his whole body as there was in poor dear George's little finger! Ah! there isn't one half the *verve* among you new people there was in my young time. Where is the man among you, who can make laughter run down the table as my friend Sheridan could? Which of you can move heads, and hearts, like Billy Pitt? Where among those idle lads in the Temple, who smoke Cavendish, and drink Bass, till they *think* nothing better than tobacco and beer, shall I see another Tom Erskine? Which among those brainless scribblers who print poems, that make one want a Tennyson's Dictionary only to understand the foolish adjectives in 'em, can write like that boy Byron, with his handsome face and his wry foot? Lord, and what a fuss there was with him when he was first made a lion! And then to turn his coffin from the Abbey! Such comic verses as he made on my parrot too, he and young Hobhouse!"

And old Fantyre, having fairly talked herself out of breath, at last halted; and De Vigne, annoyed first of all with little Jimmy in the morning, and secondly with the

attention the Trefusis gave her Cornet, neglected her for the Viscountess, with much parade thereof.

"I fear you are right, madam," he said, laughing. "Ours is an age of general action rather than individual greatness. We have a good catalogue of ships, but no Ulysses, no Atrides——"

"Ah! I don't remember them; they weren't in our set!" responded Lady Fantyre naïvely.

"Or perhaps," continued De Vigne, stroking his moustaches with laudable gravity, "it is rather that education is diffused so much more widely that the particular owners of it are not so much noticed. Arago may be as great a man as Galileo, but it is natural that a world which teaches the laws of gravitation in its twopenny schools, scarcely regards him with the same wonder as if they disbelieved in the earth's movement, and were ready to burn him for his audacity."

"Ours is an age of science and of money," suggested the Frenchman, "whose chief aim is to economize labour and time; an age in which everything is turned to full account, from dead seaweed to living brains."

"Yes," said De Vigne, "we are eminently practical; we extract the veratrin from crocuses, and value Brunel more than Bulwer! We throw our millions into a scheme for cutting through an isthmus, but we should not spare our minutes to listen to the music of the spheres though Pythagoras were resuscitated to teach us them. So best! Many more of us find it of much greater importance to get quickly to India than to wait for all the learning of the schools; and Adam Smith, though infinitely more prosaic, is a much more useful philosopher than Bolingbroke."

"Why don't you stand for your county," asked the Trefusis, playing with her breloques, and looking truly magnificent in her rose-velvet setting.

"Because I'm before my time," laughed De Vigne. "If I could have a select cabinet of *esprits forts* I should be delighted to join them, and help them to seminate liberty and tolerance; but really to settle Maynooth grants, to quarrel on 'rags or no rags,' to settle whether we shall confine ourselves to 'corks squared for rounding' or admit rounded corks into the country, to hear one noble lord blackguard his noble friend opposite, and one hon. member

split hairs with another hon. member—it would be beyond me, it would indeed! I would as soon go every night to an old ladies' tea-fight, where bonnets were rancorously discussed and characters mercilessly blackened over Souchong and muffins!"

"Come!" said the Trefusis, "you find such fault with your generation, you should set to work and regenerate it? Hunting with the Viewaway, and lounging about drawing-rooms, won't do much towards improving your species?"

"Why should I? As Sabretasche says, "*Cui bono?*'" answered De Vigne, annoyed at her sarcastic and *nonchalant* tone.

"Then you have certainly no business to sit at home at ease and laugh at other men over your claret and cigars! Why may not other geniuses have equal right to that easy put off of yours, '*Cui bono?*'"

"They have not equal right, if they have once assumed to be geniuses. Let a man assert himself to be *something*, be it a great man or a scoundrel, and the world expects him to prove his assertion. But an innocent man like myself, who troubles nobody; and never sets up for a mute inglorious Milton, declining to sing, only because his audience isn't good enough for him; has a right to be left to his claret and cigars, and not to be worried, because it happens he is not what he never pretended to be."

The Trefusis looked at him maliciously; there was the very devil in that woman's eye.

"And are you content to be lost in the bouquet of the wine, and buried in the smoke of the tobacco? Are you satisfied with spending your noble existence in an allegorical lounging chair, picking out the motes and never remembering the beam?"

The tone was provoking in the extreme; it put up De Vigne's blood, as the first touch of the snaffle does a young thorough-bred. He stroked his long moustaches.

"That depends upon circumstances. When I have had my full swing of devilries, extravagances, dissipations, pleasures, Trefusises, and other charming flowers which beset the path of youth, I may, perhaps, turn to something better!"

It was an abominably rude speech; and though De Vigne spoke in the soft, courteous tone he used to all women,

whether peeress or peasant, eighty or eighteen, it had its full effect on the Trefusis. She flushed deeply, then turned pale, and I should not have cared to provoke the malignant glance those superb eyes shot upon him. She took no notice, however, and, turning to her Guardsman, thanked him for a bouquet which he had sent to her, and pointed it out to him set, on a console near.

De Vigne drove the tilbury from the door supremely gloomy and silent.

"I say, Arthur," he said at last, "Victor Hugo says, somewhere, that we are women's playthings, and women are the devil's. I fancy Satan will get the worst of the bargain, don't you?"

"The deuce I do!—that's to say, if the war's in words; though I must say you polished off the Trefusis neatly enough just now. Did you see the look she gave you?"

"Yes," said De Vigne, shortly. "However—anything's better than a milk-and-water woman. I should grow sick of a girl who always agreed with me. They look so pretty when their blood's up! Where shall we go now? Suppose we turn into the Yard, and take a look at those steel greys Sabretasche mentioned? I want a new pair to run tandem. And then we can take a turn or two round the Ring, and I'll show you the women worth cultivating, young one."

We followed out his programme, bargained for the greys at two hundred and fifty—and immensely cheap, too, for they were three-parts thorough-bred, with beautiful action—drove half-a-dozen times round the Ring, where fifty pair of bright eyes gleamed softly on De Vigne, from the Marchioness of Hautton in her stately barouche, to little Coralie of Her Majesty's ballet in her single horse brougham; and then went to mess, where, the Dashers (being as crack a corps as the Tenth, the Eleventh, or the Blues), had a peculiar pattern for their plate, a *Cordon bleu* for their cook, and a good claret connoisseur in their Colonel. The claret was better than Cambridge port, the dinner was rather superior to Hall, and the men furnished wit choicer than Monckton's Joe Miller jokes, and Phil Hervey's Simon the Cellarer, at our Wines. I liked this dash of my new life at any rate, and I regretted leaving the table when Sabretasche invited me to go with him to the Opera, for I didn't

care two pins for music; I did not dare, however, to refuse the first favour from such an exclusive man, and, besides, having just seen little Coralie in the Ring, I consoled myself with the thought of the ballet to be given in the new opera. De Vigne was going, too, for reasons best known to himself; and went to his stall, while I followed the Colonel to his box, in the middle of the second act.

Sabretasche spoke not at all while Grisi was on the stage, and I put my lorgnon up and took a glance round the house. I always think Her Majesty's, on a grand night, with all the boxes filled with the handsomest and best-dressed women in town, one of the prettiest sights going; and I did the grand tier deliberately, going from loge to loge; and in one of its centre boxes, with the scarlet folds of an opera cloak floating round her, and scarlet camellias against her white lace dress, and in her rich dark hair, sat the Trefusis, with little bright-eyed, hooked-nosed, bewigged, and black Mechlin'd, old Fantyre as a foil.

Presently the Trefusis raised her bouquet to her lips quite carelessly, to take its perfume, I presume! I happened to look down at De Vigne: his lorgnon was fixed on her too. He smiled, left his stall, and in a minute or two I saw him displacing young Lascelles of the Blues and bending down over the Trefusis.

"What do you think of that affair, Chevasnev?" said the Colonel to me, as the curtain came down.

"I don't know how it stands. Enlighten me, will you?"

Sabretasche shook his head.

"I know no more than yourself. De Vigne, like all wise men, is silent upon his own business, and I never attempt to pry into it. I see the thing on its surface, and it seems to me that the lady is serious, whatever he be."

"Serious? Oh? hang it! he can't be serious."

"*Tant pis pour lui* if he be," said the Colonel, smiling. "But, my dear boy, you do not know women as yet; how should you, in two-and-twenty years, have read that enigmatical book, which is harder to guess at than Sanscrit or Black letter? You can never fathom the deep game that a clever one like the Trefusis, if I mistake her not, can play when she chooses."

*I*, the most knowing hand in Granta—I, who if I did

pique myself on any one thing, piqued myself on my skill and knowledge in managing the *beau sexe—I*, to be told I did not know women! I pocketed the effront, however, as best I might, for I felt a growing respect for the Colonel, with his myriad talents, his brilliant reputation, and mysterious reserve; and told him I did not believe De Vigne cared an atom more for the Trefusis than for twenty others before her.

"I hope so," he answered; "but that chess they are playing yonder ends too often in checkmate. However, we will not prophesy so bad a fate for our friend; for worse he could not have than to fall into those soft hands. By the way, though, her hands are *not* soft, they are not the hands of a lady."

"You have a bad opinion of the Trefusis, Colonel?"

"Not of the Trefusis in particular."

"Of her sex, then?"

"I may have cause," he answered, briefly. "How full the house is, and how few of those people come for music! How few of them would care if it were dance trash of D'Albert's, if the dance-music chanced to be most in fashion. Make it the rage, and three-quarters of the music lovers here would run after a barrel-organ ground on that stage, as they are now doing after Mario. Half England, if the Court, the Peerage, and Belgravia voted the sun a bore, and a rushlight *comme il faut*, would instantly shut their shutters and burn rushlights while the fashion lasted! And then people care for the world's opinion!"

"Because they can't get on without it."

"True enough!—they despise it, but they must bow to it before they can use it and turn it to their own ends; those must, at least, who live by sufferance on it, and through it. Thank God, I want nothing from it and can defy it at my leisure; or rather forget and neglect it; defying is too much trouble. A man who *defies* is certain to raise a hue and cry at his heels, whose bray and clamour is as senseless as it is deafening, and no more able to declare what it has come out after than Dogberry. Ah, you are studying that girl in the fifth from the centre. That is little Eulalie Papillon. Does she not look a pretty, innocent dove? Yet she will cost those three fellows with her more than a racing stud, and she is as avaricious as Harpagon!

extended it to Sabretasche and to me. The Colonel smiled, bowed his acquiescence, and told his man to drive us to Bruton-street, as De Vigne sprang into the Fantyre brougham.

"I was engaged to what I liked much better, lansquenet at Hollingsworth's; but I want to see how the game lies in Bruton-street. I fancy that woman's moves will be worth watching," said Sabretasche, throwing himself back on his cushions. "By the way, *who* is she—do you know?"

"The devil I don't! Somebody up at Cambridge said she was old Fantyre's companion; others whispered her daughter, others her niece, others, what the old woman said nerself, that she is the child of her brother—a John, or James, or something monosyllabic, Trefusis."

"No very exalted lineage that," returned Sabretasche; "for if report be true—and I believe it is—the Fantyre at sixteen was an orange-girl, crying, 'Who'll buy 'em, two a penny!" up St. James's-street; that Fantyre, the most eccentric of eccentric Irishmen (and all Hibernians have a touch of madness!) beheld her from his window in Arthur's, fell in love with her foot and leg, walked out, offered to her, in the street, was accepted of course, and married at seventy-five. What fools there are in the world, Chevasney! She pushed her way cleverly enough, though *as* to knowing all the exclusives she talks about, she no more knew them than my dog did. She heard of them, of course; saw some of the later ones at Ranelagh and the Wells; very likely won francs at piquet from poor Brummel, when he was in decadence at Caen, to put him in mind of the palmy days when he fleeced Coombe of ponies; possibly entertained Talleyrand when he was glad of an English asylum: and, of course, would get together Moore, and Jeffreys, and Tom Erskine, and all the young fellows; for a pretty woman and a shrewd woman can always make men forget she sprang from the gutter. But as to the others—pooh! she was no more intimate with them than I; old Fantyre himself was in far too *mal odeur*, and left his widow to live by her wits rather than to figure as a leader of ton. Here we are; it will all be very *comme il faut*. I bet you, Chevasney, Lady Fantyre is afraid of my eye-glass!"

It was all *comme il faut*. De Vigne was sitting beside the Trefusis, his glowing passionate eyes fixed on hers;

while in her face was merely the look of calm, conscious beauty, gratified at triumph and exigeant of homage; a beauty the embodiment of tyranny; a beauty which would exult in denying the passion it excited; a beauty only a tool in the hands of its possessor, to pioneer a path for her ambitions, and draw within her reach the prizes that she coveted.

De Vigne did not look best pleased to see us. I dare say he would have preferred a *tête-à-tête* supper with old Lady Fantyre dozing after her champagne! Such, however, was denied to him; perhaps they knew how to manage him better than to make his game too easy. Do any of us care for the tame pheasants knocked over at our feet in a battue, as we do for an outlying royal that has led us many hours' weary toil, through burn and bracken, over rock and furze? We knock down the pheasants to swell our score, and leave them where they fall, to be picked up after us; but difficulty and excitement warm our blood and fire our pride, and we think no toil or trouble too great to hear the ping of the bullet, and see the deer grallocked at last!

We had a very pleasant supper. Opera-suppers are always pleasant to my mind; there is a freedom about them that gives a certain *pointe à la sauce*, which it would be better for ladies to put down among their items for entertainment, a good deal oftener than they do. There was plenty of champagne, and under its genial influences the Fantyre tongue was loosened, and Sabretasche amused himself with the old lady's shrewd wit and not over-particular stories; — a queer contrast enough himself to the little snuffy, rouged, and wigged Irish peeress, with his delicate beauty of feature, and indolent refinement of tone; while De Vigne, fired by the Parthian glances which had been so freely bestowed—on him, and the proximity of that superb Trefusis, his idol—at least for the present—talked with the wit of which, when he chose, no man on earth could give out more brilliant corruscations. The Trefusis never said very much; hers was chiefly silent warfare.

"What did you think of the ballet, Colonel?" asked old Fantyre, peering up into his face. At seventy-six women are still much kinder to a handsome man than to a plain one.

"I thought very little of it," answered Sabretasche,

"Coralie has no grace; boys make a fuss with her because she happens to be pretty, but as for her dancing—faugh. scores of Castilian girls I have seen doing the fandango, under the village chesnut-trees, would beat her hollow."

"Glorious dance that fandango is!" said De Vigne. "I have danced the fandango; no more able to help myself when the girl and the castanets began, than the holy cardinals, who, when they came to Madrid to excommunicate the cachuca, ended by joining in it! Like the rest of us, I suppose, they found forbidding a thing to other people, very easy and pleasant, but going without it themselves rather more difficult."

"*You* never go without a thing you like, do you?" asked the Trefusis.

"Certainly not. Why should I?'

"I don't know; only—boys who have revelled in Bath buns, sometimes rue it, when they realise Chromate of lead."

"Oh! as for that," laughed De Vigne, "the moralists make out that a sort of Chromate of lead follows, as natural sequence, any Bath buns one may fancy to eat. I don't see it myself."

"Your best Bath buns are women, De Vigne?" said Lady Fantyre, with her silent chuckle, "and you'll be uncommonly lucky, my dear, if you don't find some Chromate of lead, as you call it, after one or two of *them*."

"He will, indeed," smiled Sabretasche. "Ladies are the exact antipodes of olives: the one begins in salt, and leaves us blessed with a delicious rose aroma; the other, with all due deference, is nectar to commence with, but how soon, through our fault entirely, of course, they turn into very gall!"

Lady Fantyre chuckled again; she was a wise old woman, in her way, and enjoyed nothing more than a hit at her own sex. To be sure, she was leaving the field very fast, and perhaps grudged the new combatants her cast-off weapons.

"True enough, Colonel; yet, if one many believe naughty stories, the flavour's been one uncommonly to your taste?"

Sabretasche shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear lady, can one put aside the Falernian because there will be some *amari aliquid* at the bottom of the glass? Nobody loved the sex better than Mahomet, yet he learned

enough from his favourite almond eyes to create his heaven without women!"

"What a heathen you are, Sabretasche!" cried De Vigne. "If I were Miss Trefusis, I wouldn't speak to you!"

"My dear fellow, I could support it!" said Sabretasche, naïvely, with such delicious Brummelian impudence that I believe Lady Fantyre could have kissed him—a favour for which the Colonel would have been anything but grateful.

The Trefusis's eyes glared; De Vigne, sitting next her, did not catch their expression, or I think, though he might be getting mad about her, he would not have taken the trouble he did, to look so tenderly at her, and whisper, "If he could bear it, *I* could not."

"Yes, you could," said the Trefusis, through her pearly teeth. "You would make me the occasion for an epigram on female caprice, and go and pay the same compliments to Lady Hautton or Coralie the danseuse. I never knew the man who could not support, with most philosophic indifference, the cruelty of one woman if he had another to turn to!—provided indeed she had not left him for some one else, when, perhaps, his pride *might* be a little piqued."

De Vigne smiled: he was pleased to see her annoyed.

"Well! we are philosophic in self-defence, probably; but you are mistaken in thinking so lightly of the wounds you give: and I am sorry you should be so, for you will be more likely to refuse to what you fancy a mere scratch, the healing touch that you might, perhaps, be persuaded to accord if you were more fully aware of the harm you had done."

Sabretasche interrupted him.

"Talking of wounds, De Vigne? My dear fellow, who gets them now? The surest way of wounding, if such a thing be possible when the softest little *ingénue* wears a chain-armour of practical egotism, is to keep invulnerable yourself. Miss Trefusis teaches us that."

"You know the world, Colonel," smiled old Fantyre "I like men who do: they amuse one. When one's been behind the scenes oneself, those poor silly fools who sit in front of the stage, and believe in Talma's strut and Siddons' tears, in the rouge and the paint, and the tinsel and the trap-doors, do tire one so! You talk of your *ingénues;* I'm sure they're the most stupid lot possible!"

"Except when they're *ingénues de Saint Lô,*" laughed De Vigne.

"Which most of them are," said the Fantyre. "Take my word for it, my dear, if you find women extra simple, sweet, and prudish, you will be no match for her! Sherry's a very pleasant, light, innocent sort of wine, but strychnine's sometimes given in it, you know, for all that; and if a girl casts her eyes down more timidly than usual, you may be pretty sure those eyes have looked on queerer scenes than you fancy."

"To be sure," said De Vigne. "'*C'est trop contre un mari*' (or *un amant*) '*d'être coquette et dévote: une femme devrait opter.*'"

"Then when you marry, you will take your wife out of a casino rather than a convent?" asked the old lady, with a comical smile.

The Trefusis shot a keen, rapid, hard glance at him, as he laughed, "Come, come, Lady Fantyre, is there no medium?"

'Between prudes and Aspasias?" said her shrill little treble. "No, sir—not that I ever saw—and even, *les extrêmes se touchent*, you know."

"Hush! hush!" cried Sabretasche, "you will corrupt me, Lady Fantyre—positively you will—you will make me think shockingly of all my kind, soft-voiced, soft-skinned friends!"

"Somebody has made you think as badly of women as you can," said the sharp old woman. "Not I! What do you think of that Moselle, De Vigne?"

He thought it good, but not so good as the Trefusis, who acted out the song, "Drink to me with thine eyes," in a manner eminently calculated to intoxicate him more, than all the wine ever pressed from Rhenish vineyards. And when she took a little dainty cigarette between her lips, and leant back on her favourite rose couch, laughing at the Fantyre scandals, and flashing on De Vigne her brightest glances; even Sabretasche and I, who were set against her by that most dogged thing, a prejudice, could not deny that a finer woman had never worried a man's peace of mind out of him, or sent him headlong into follies which shut out all chance of a fairer future or a wiser path.

"Come in and smoke a pipe, Arthur," said De Vigne, when we at length left the Fantyre *petit souper*, and Sabretasche had gone to his lansquenet at Hollingsworth's. "'Tisn't worth while going anywhere else, to-night; it'

three now. I have some splendid Glenlivet (how naturally one offers a Cantab something to drink! as naturally as to a cabman, I declare), and I should like a chat with you. Hallo! where's my number. Confound it! why do they build town-houses all alike, that one can't know one's own by a particular mark, as the mother in the novels always knows her stolen child? Symmetry? Oh! that's like Sabretasche. One wants symmetry in a racer, I allow, but in one's lodging-house I could put up without it, rather than pull up Vivandière on her haunches twice for nothing. Where's my latch-key? Right on, up the stairs; I'll follow you. By George! who's that smoking in my rooms? It can't be Harris, because I gave him leave to go to Cremorne, and not come home till morning, in time to fill my bath. It *is* tobacco, Arthur. What a devilish impertinence!"

He pushed open the door. On De Vigne's pet sofa, with a French novel in his hand, and a meerschaum in his lips, lay lazy, girlish-looking, lighthearted "Little Curly."

"Curly!" cried De Vigne. "By Jove, how delighted I am! Curly! Where, in Heaven's name, did you spring from, my boy?"

"I sprang from nowhere," responded Curly, taking his pipe out of his mouth. "I've given up gymnastics, they're too fatiguing. I drove down from Claridge's, in a cab that privately informed me it had just taken six cases of scarlet fever, and three of small-pox, to the hospitals; I found you were out—of course I knew you would be—and with the philosophy which always characterises my slightest movements, took Fevillet, found out a pipe (how well you brown yours, by the way), and made myself jolly."

"Quite right," responded De Vigne, who was a perfect Arab for hospitality. "Delighted to see you. We're quite a Frestonhills re-union. What a pity the Doctor is not here, and dear Arabella! But I say, Curly, have you got quit of Granta, like this disreputable fellow, or are you only run up on leave, or how is it?"

"Don't you remember my degree was given me this year because I am a Peer's son?" asked Curly, reprovingly. See what it is to be a Goth, without a classical education! You *should* have gone to Granta, De Vigne, you'd have been Stroke of the Cambridge Eight, not a doubt of it. There's muscle gone to waste! It's very jolly, you see,

being an Honourable, though I never knew it; one gets credit for brains whether one has them or not. What an inestimable blessing to some of the pillars of the aristocracy, isn't it? I suppose the House of Lords was instituted on that principle; and its members are no more required to know why they pass their bills, than we, their sons and heirs, are required to know why we pass our examinations, eh?"

"And what are you going to do with yourself now;" put in De Vigne. "For the present you'll keep on that sofa, and drink S. and B.; but *après?*"

"*Après?* Well, the governor wanted me to go in for diplomacy, but I wasn't up to it—lies are not my specialty, they're too much trouble; so I demonstrated to him that it was clearly my mission to drink brandy, distract women, run into debt, curse parade, turn out on show days, and otherwise enjoy life, and swear at ennui with you fellows in the Queen's. His mind was not open to it at first, but I soon improved his limited vision, and my name's now down at the Horse Guards, where, after a little neat jobbery, I dare say the thing'll soon be done."

"Your governor manageable?" said I.

Curly yawned, and opened his blue eyes a little wider.

"Of course; I should cut him if he wasn't. You see he's a snob (I wanted him to put on his carriage-panel—

Who'd have thought it?
Cotton bought it!

but he declined), and my mother's a Dorset; gave her title for his yellows. Now my brother Gus, poor devil! is the regular *parvenu* breed; short, thick, red whiskers, snub nose, and all the rest of it; while I, as you see, gentlemen," said Curly, glancing at himself with calm complacent vanity, "am a remarkably good-looking fellow, eminently presentable and creditable to my progenitors: a second Spurina, and a regular Dorset. Therefore, the governor hates Gus (sneaky I consider it, as it is through his remarkable likeness to him that Gus is fit to frighten his looking-glass), but adores *me*, and lets me twist him round this little finger of mine, *voyez-vous?*"

"And how's Julia?" asked De Vigne.

Curly looked as savage as *he* could look.

"Julia? Confound her! how should I know? She's been and hooked some old boy or other, I believe, poor devil!"

"Who's the poor devil?" laughed De Vigne; "the man for being caught, or you for being deserted? Take comfort, Curly; there never was a man jilted yet who didn't return thanks for it twelve months after. When I was twenty, and went over to Canada for six weeks' buffalo-hunting, I fell mad in love with a great Toronto beauty, a sheriff's widow. Such ancles she had, and didn't she show them on the Ontario! It was really one of the most serious affairs I ever had, and she flirted me into a downright proposal. The most wide-awake man, is a donkey, when he is young. But who should come on the scene just then but a rich old fur-merchant, with no end of dollars, and a tremendous house at New York; and my little widow, thinking I was very young, and knowing nothing whatever of Vigne and its belongings, quietly threw me over, forswore all the pretty things things we'd said to one another in sledging and skating, and went to live among the Broadway belles. I swore and suffered horribly; she turned the pampas into swamps, and absolutely made me utterly indifferent to bison. I lived on pipes and soda-water for a week, and recovered. But when I ran over to America last winter to see Egerton of the Rifles, I met in Quebec a dreadful woman, ten stone at least, in a bright green dress, with blue things in her hair, and rubies for her jewels, her skin as yellow as gold, and as wrinkled as the Fantyre's; and I might have married that woman, with her shocking broad English, and her atrocious 'Do tell!' What fervent thanks I returned for the fur-merchant's creation and my own preservation! So will you, Curly, when, ten years hence, you happen to drop in at the Snoozeinrest Rectory, and find Julia as stiff as her brown-paper tracts, and as vinegar as the moral lessons she gives her parishioners, restricting her pastor and master to three glasses, and making your existence miserable at dessert by the entrance of four or five brats with shrill voices and monkey propensities, who make you look at them and their mother with a thrill of the deepest rapture, rejoicing that, thank Heaven, you are not a family man!"

De Vigne spoke the truth. Why the deuce did not he

remember that his passion for the Trefusis might be quite as utterly misplaced as his fancy for the Toronto widow, or the Cantab's flirtation with Miss Julia? But, ah me! if the truth were always in our minds, or the future always plain before us, should we make the fifty false steps that the wisest man amongst us is certain to rue before half his sands are run? If they knew that before night was down the sea-foam would be whirling high, and the curlews screaming in human fear, and the gay little boat lying keel upwards on the salt ocean surf, would the pleasure-party set out so fearlessly in the morning sunshine, with champagne flowing and bright eyes glancing, and joyous laughter ringing over the golden sands and up to the fleecy heavens?

## CHAPTER V.

### WHAT WAS UNDER THE CARDS.

THAT night, after we were gone, old Fantyre sat with her feet on the fender of her dressing-room, sans wig, teeth, rouge, cosmetique, velvet, or lace; and an uncommonly hideous old woman she must have looked in that guise, I am certain, though, thank Heaven! I cannot speak to the fact from ocular observation. The Trefusis sat there, too, looking all the handsomer for dishabille, in a cerise-hued *peignoir* and fur slippers, and her thick long raven hair unbraided, and hanging to her waist.

"My dear," began the Fantyre, "do you think you hold the trumps in that game you're playing?"

"Certainly I do. Why?"

"Because I'm not so sure. You're playing fast and loose with De Vigne, and that don't always succeed. Brummel said to me, "If we pique a woman, she is ours.' That's true enough with us, because we're such fools; nine times out of ten a woman don't care a rush for a man who's dying at her feet; while she's crazy about some ugly brute, who takes no more notice of her than he does of his dirty boots. Women love to go to heel, and they'll crawl after a man who double-thongs them, in preference to one who lets them rule him. Besides, *we*'re jealous; we hate one another like poison from our cradles; and if a man neglects us we fancy he likes

somebody else, and, of course, that's quite enough to make us want to trap him away from her, whoever she be! But with men sometimes it's a dangerous game. They're the most impatient creatures in creation, and if one trout won't rise to the fly, they go off and whip another stream. All fish are alike pretty well to 'em, so that they fill their basket. Men's aim is Pleasure, and if you don't give it to'em they will go somewhere else for it."

"True enough," said the Trefusis; "but at the same time, to a good many men Difficulty is everything. Men of hot passion and strong will delight in pursuit, and soon grow tired of victory. They enjoy knocking the bird over; that done, it loses all interest for them. De Vigne is such a man; rouse his pride, you win him—yield easily, and you miss him."

"Maybe, my dear—may be! You know him better than I do, and must manage him as you choose. I dare say he does like climbing over spikes and chevaux-de-frise to get what he fancies; he's the stamp of creature that's never happy out of excitement or danger, and Montaigne thinks like you; '*Elles nous battent mieux en fuyant, comme les Scythes.*' How racy his old French is! I wish I had known that man! I say, those two friends of his shouldn't be with him too much, for they don't like us; that boy Chevasney——"

"Boy, indeed!" echoed the Trefusis.

"But De Vigne is fond of him?"

"I believe so; but De Vigne is never influenced by anybody."

"I hope he may not be, except by you, and that won't be to his advantage, poor fellow! He's a very handsome pigeon, my dear—a very handsome one, indeed!" chuckled the old lady. "But the other one is more dangerous than Chavasney; I mean that beautiful creature—what's his name?—Vivian Sabretasche. He don't think much about us, I dare say; but he don't like us. He sees through us, my dear, and, ten to one, he'll put De Vigne on his guard."

"De Vigne listens to nobody who comes between him and his passion of the moment; and how is it possible that Sabretasche should see through us, as you term it?"

"Not all our hand, my dear, but one or two cards. That calm nonchalant way of his conceals a wonderful deal of

keen observation—too keen for us. Vivian Sabretasche is very witty and very careless, and the world tells very light stories of him; but he's a man that not Satan himself could deceive."

"Well, nobody wants to deceive him."

"Don't you want to marry his friend?"

"Enough of that, Lady Fantyre! I will neither be lectured nor schooled. You agreed to help me, but you agreed, too, to let me succeed in my own way. I tell you, I know how to manage him, and that before this year is out, in spite of Chevasney, Sabretasche, or anybody—yes, in spite of *himself*—I shall be Granville De Vigne's wife?"

"I wish you may, my dear," said the Fantyre, with another chuckle. "Well, don't talk to me any more, child. Get Le Brun, will you, and read me to sleep."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A DOUBLED-DOWN PAGE IN THE COLONEL'S BOOK OF LIFE.

What a pace one lives at through the season! And when one is fresh to it, before one knows that its pleasant, frothy, syllabub surface is only a cover to intrigues, petty spites, jealousies, partisanships, manœuvres! alike in St. Stephen's as in Belgravia; among uncompromising patriots as among poor foreigners farming private banks round about St. James's-street; among portly aristocratic mothers, trotting out their innocent daughters to the market, as among the gauze-winged, tinselled, hard-worked deities of the coulisses;—how agreeable it is! Illusion in one's first season lasts, I think, about the space of one month. With its blissful-bandeau over our eyes, we really do admire the belles of the Ring and the Ride; we go to balls to dance, and to dinners for society. We swallow larks for ortolans, and Cremorne gooseberry for Cliquot's. We believe in the innocent demoiselles, who look so naïve, and such sweet English rosebuds at morning fêtes, and do not dream those glossy braids cover empty, but world-shrewd little heads, ever plotting how to eclipse dearest Cecilia, or win old Hautton's coronet; we accept their mamma's invitations,

and think how kindly they are given, not knowing that we are only asked because we bring Shako of the Guards with us, who is our bosom chum, and has fifteen thousand a year, and that, Shako fairly hooked, we, being younger sons, shall be gently dropped. We go to the Lords and Commons, and believe A. when he says he has the deepest admiration for his noble friend B., whom he hates like poison; and we reverence D. when he pleads for the liberty of "the people," whom over his claret he classifies as "beastly snobs." We regard the coulisses with delight, as a temple whose Eleusinia it is high honour to penetrate, and fall veritably in love with all those fair nymphs fluttering their spirit veils as Willis, or clanking their spurs as Mazurka maidens.

That delightful state of faith lasts about a month, then we discard the bandeau, and use an eye-glass instead; learn to confine ourselves to "Not bad-looking" before the handsomest woman in the Park; find out that dinners are a gathering for high feeding, but not by any means bound to furnish society; pronounce balls a bore, and grow critical of ankles. We are careful of the English rosebuds, knowing that, kept out of view, those innocent petals have thorns, which they know well how to thrust out and dexterously impale us on them. We take mamma's invitations at their worth, and watch the dragons' teeth opening for the luckless Shako, with grim terror of a similar fate; we laugh over seltzer with a chum of ours, a whip in the Commons, who lets us into a thing or two concerning the grandiose jobbery of Downing-street; and find out that coulisses atmosphere, however agreeable, is no exclusive boon; that its sesame is a bracelet to the first dancer, who, though she may take a Duke's brougham, is not insensible to even a Cornet's tribute, if it come from Hunt and Roskell, and we give less love and more Cremorne lobster-salad to the Willis and Mazurka maidens!

Such, at least, was my case; and when I was fairly in the saddle and off at a pace, like a Doncaster favourite's through my first season, enjoyed it considerably, even when the bandeau *was* off my eyes, which thanks to De Vigne and Sabretasche, took place very speedily.

Of De Vigne I did not see so much as if no Trefusis had been in being, for he was constantly after her, going with her to morning concerts, or Richmond luncheons: riding

with her in the Park, lending her a horse, too, for that showy bay of hers had come out of Bruton Mews, and no livery-stable mount is fit for any mortal, much less for a female; attending her everywhere, but not as yet "compromising" himself, as, according to the peculiar code of honour in such cases, we may give a girl a bracelet with impunity to ourselves; but are lost if we hazard a diamond circlet for her "third finger." That comes rather hard on those poor women, by the way; for Lovelace may talk, and look, and make love, in every possible style; yet, if he stop short of the "essential question," Lovelace may go scot free! We remark what a devil of a girl it is to flirt; and her sworn allies, who have expressed sympathy to her in engraved notes of the fondest pathos, agree among themselves "How conceited poor Laura is to fancy Lovelace *could* be serious! Why, dear, all that means nothing; only Laura, poor thing! has had so little attention, she doesn't know what it is. If she had had a man mad about her, as you and I have had, love—ah! do you remember poor Frank Cavendish at the race ball?" Whereon the sworn allies scent their *vinaigrettes*, indulging pleasurable recollections; and Lovelace burns Laura's lock of hair which he asked for, under the limes in the moonlight; thinks "How deucedly near I was! must be more careful next time," and wonders what sort of girls he shall find at Brighton.

De Vigne, however, as long as he would not come well up to hand, received no flirting kindnesses from the Trefusis—not even so much as a note to thank him for his concert-tickets, or a flower from the very bouquet he had sent her. Perhaps she knew by clairvoyance that her Cambridge azalea had gone ignominiously into the grate; for she tried on that style no more, but was coy and reserved, as if Hannah More had been her *chaperone* instead of old Sarah, Lady Fantyre. This worried, excited, and roused him, and I saw, without needing much penetration, that he was drinking deeper and deeper of a stimulant which he never refused when it was fairly to his lips, and which brings worse follies and wilder deeds, and more resistless madness to men than lie in the worse insanities of *del. trem.*, or the dreams of a thousand grains of opium! Sabretasche and I used to swear at the power of the Trefusis, and lament De Vigne's infatuation together: but we could do nothing to

weaken either; opposition to a man in love is like oil to fire!

Sabretasche was remarkably kind to me; he introduced me in his set, one of the most intellectual in town; he admitted me to his charming dinners; and he let me into his studio, the most luxurious miniature art-palace possible, where, when employed on his marble or on his canvas, no one was ever allowed to disturb him. Sabretasche knew to perfection the great art, "How to live," and he had every facility for enjoying life: riches, refined taste, art, intellect; men who sought him, women who courted him, a facile wit, a sweet temper; yet, somehow or rather, you could trace in him a certain shadow, often dissipated, it is true, in the sunshine of his gay words, and the music of his laugh; but certain to creep over him again—an intangible shade of disappointment. Perhaps he had exhausted life too early; perhaps his refinement was jarred by the very pleasures he sought; perhaps the classic mould of his mind was not, after all, satisfied with the sedatives he give it:—however, —as for speculating on Sabretasche, all town pretty well did that, more or less, but nobody in town was ever any the wiser for it. One morning I was going to breakfast with him; his nominal breakfast-hour was noon; though I believe he often rose very much earlier, took a cup of coffee, and chipped, or read, or painted in his studio. I took my way across the Garden's to Sabretasche's house, which was at the upper end of Park Lane, taking that *détour* for motives of my own. Gwendolina Brandling, Curly's eldest sister, an exquisite nymph of eighteen, with *crépé* hair, had confided to me the previous day, over strawberry-ice, at a fête at Twickenham, that she was in the habit of accompanying her little sisters in their morning walk with their governess, to "put her in mind of the country," and the Hon. Gwen being a fresh, honest-hearted, and exceedingly nice-looking girl, I took my way through the Gardens about eleven, looking out for Curly's sister among the pretty nursemaids, ugly children, and abominable ankle-breaking, dress-tearing perambulators which filled the walks. There was no Hon. Gwen at present: and I threw myself down under one of the trees, put my eye-glass in my eye, and took out that day's "Punch" to while away the time till Gwen and her attendants might come in sight.

Suddenly a voice fell on my ear, speaking coarsely and jocosely in Italian, "Come, signor, why waste time about it? You know that your secret is worth more than I ask. You know you would give half your riches to make sure it would never be known by anybody, to efface it altogether —eh, *eccellenza?* Come! I ask a very low price; not worth jangling about; no more to you than a few *scudi* to me. Why waste time? You know I can bring proofs over in twenty-four hours, and then the show-up——"

"Take it, and begone with you!"

Ye gods!—that last voice, cold, contemptuous, full of disgust and wrath, I recognized as Sabretasche's! Involuntarily I turned to look; and saw the most fastidious and the proudest man in town, in company with a shabbily, showily-dressed fellow, with rings on his fingers, and a vulgar, insolent face, which wore at that minute an abominably insulting smile, as the Colonel shoved a roll of bank-notes into his hand, loathing and impatience quivering over his own features. The man laughed—a laugh as impudent as his smile:

"Thank you, signor, a thousand thanks. I won't trouble you again till—I'm again in difficulties."

Sabretasche gave him no answer, but turning his back upon the man, folded his arms upon his chest, and walked away across the Gardens, with his head bent down, while the fellow counted the notes with glistening, triumphant eyes, crushed them up as if he loved their crisp new rustle, stroked his beard, whistled an air from "Figaro," and strolled on towards the gate; leaving me in a state of profound amazement at the vulgar acquaintance the Colonel had selected, and the secret by which this underbred foreigner seemed able to hold in check so profound a man of the world as Sabretasche.

Just at that minute, Gwen and her duenna appeared in the distance; and I went to meet them, and talked of Grisi and Mario, of Balfe's new song, and Sims Reeves' last concert, with the hundred topics current in the season, while the little ones ran about, and the French governess chatted and laughed, and Gwen smiled and looked like a sunbeam, and told me about her ponies and dogs and flowers down in Hampshire. Poor Gwen! She is Madame la Duchesse de la Vieillecour now, not over happy, I fear, despite the

diamonds I saw flashing on her brow and neck last night at the Tuileries. In the gorgeous glories of her Champs Elysées hotel, in the light beauty of her summer villa at Enghien, in the gloomy state and magnificence of her château in the Côte d'Or, whose massive iron gates close like a death-knell, does she ever think, I wonder, of those spring mornings in the Gardens when *she* was in her spring-time too?

It was just twelve when I reached the Colonel's house. I was shown straight to his own room; and there he lay on one of the couches, calm, cool, imperturbable as ever, not a trace visible of his past excitement and irritation, very unlike a man with a secret hanging over his head and darkening his life! He stretched out his hand with a kind smile:

"Well, Arthur. Good morning to you. You are just in time for the match; Du Loo has not been here five minutes."

Du Loo was a heavy, good-humoured, stupid fellow in the Blues, who prided himself on his fine teeth and his boxing, and who was going, at half-past twelve, to have a little play with Fighting Chatney, one of the Fancy, who let himself out to beat gentlemen, in order that gentlemen might learn to beat.

On the carpet at Sabretasche's feet lay a great retriever, the one thing in the whole world for which he cared, chiefly, I believe, because, when a stray pup, it had trusted itself to his kindness.

"Poor old Cid!" said he, pausing in his breakfast to set the dog down some larded guinea-fowl. "I spoil him for sport, you say? Perhaps; but I don't want him for sport, and I make his life comfortable. I see in him one thing in this Via Dolorosa; that is perfectly content and happy; and it is a treat to see it. Cid and I are fast friends; and we love one another, don't we, old boy?"

The Cid looked up at him with two honest, tender brown eyes, and wagged his tail: Sabretasche had talked to him till, I believe, the dog understood him, quite as well as I did.

"There are lots of women, Colonel," said Du Loo "would bid high for the words you throw away on that dog."

"Possibly. But are any of them as faithful, and honest,

and worthy, as my Cid? The Cid would like broken bones and a barn with me, as well as French cookery and velvet cushions. I'm sorry I couldn't say as much for my fair ladies, Du Loo."

"The devil! no," yawned the Guardsman. "Catch a woman giving up her opera-box and her milliner. Why, the other night I saw Nelly Lacquers, the British Beggars' Bank man's wife, got up no end at the Silverton drum, laughing and talking, waltzing, and carrying pearls worth two thousand; and, by George! if there isn't a warrant out against her husband this morning for swindling! Musn't she be a horrid, heartless, little bit of flippery?"

"It doesn't follow," said Sabretasche. "Most likely he sent her there to disarm suspicion, while he shipped off his specie to France or America, and got his passport to Calais. I never judge people; seemingly bad actions may have good motives, good ones may spring from base and selfish ends."

Du Loo stared at him.

"What the deuce, Colonel! *you* turning sermoniser?"

"No, my dear fellow, I have enough conscience left not to preach before practising; though truly if that were the rule in the land, few pulpits would be filled! But I *have* one virtue—tolerance; therefore I may preach that. There is your friend, Fighting Chatney. Now for your seventh heaven, Du Loo!"

"And yours too?"

"Mine? No! there is a degree of absurdity in two mortals setting solemnly to work to pommel one another; there is something unpoetic, and coarse, and savage, about blood and bruises; and, besides—it is so much exertion! However, go at it; it is for Arthur's delectation, and I can go into my studio if I'm tired."

Du Loo and his pet of the Fancy retired to the far end of the room, and there set-to, delivering from the left shoulder, and drinking as much beer between their rounds as a couple of draymen. As the match had been arranged for my express pleasure, of course I watched it with the deepest interest, though Sabretasche's remark for once gave the noble art a certain degree of ludicrousness, mingled with the admiration with which I had been accustomed to regard such "little mills." Du Loo finally floored the bruiser, to his own extreme glorification, while the Pet very generously

growled out to him that he might be as great a man as the Tipton Slasher, if he would but train himself properly. Du Loo left, and Sabretasche asked me to stay ten minutes, to let him finish a picture which he had been amusing himself by taking of me, in crayons;—a portrait, by the way, which is a far better one than any I have ever had done by R.A.'s, and which my mother still cherishes devotedly at Longholme.

"What a strange fellow Du Loo is," said the Colonel, "or, rather, what a common one! The man's greatest delight is a Moulsey mill, and his ambitions are locked up in the brutalities of the Ring. Of any higher world he is utterly ignorant. Talk to him of art and genius, you might as well discourse to him in Hebrew! Take him out under the summer stars, he would look bored, yawn, and ask for his cigar. Positively, Arthur, he makes one feel one's link to the animals mortifying close. In truth, the distance between the zoophytes and man, is not wider than the gulf between a Goethe and a prize-fighter, is it? It is proportion of brain which makes the man superior to the pig; should it not make as distinct a mark between the clod of the valley and the cultured scholar? But why am I talking all this nonsense to you? You have more amusing occupation than to listen to my fancies. Turn a little nearer the light. That is it! Have you seen De Vigne to-day?"

"No; he was gone somewhere with the Trefusis and Fantyre, confound them! Do you think she will win, Colonel?"

"My dear boy, how can I tell. I think she will if she can. '*Donne gentile devote d'amore*' generally manage to marry a man if they have full play with him. If De Vigne only saw her in morning calls, when his head was cool, and others were with him, possibly he might keep out of it; but she waltzes with him—she waltzes remarkably well, too—she shoots Parthian glances at him in the *tête-à-tête* of conservatories, after the mess champagne; moreover, ten to one, in some of those soft moments, he will say more than being a man of honour, he can unsay."

"And be cursed for life!"

"Possibly. Love does that for a good many, and in the fantasy of early passion many men have surrendered their entire lives to one who has made them—a blank! Troublesome eyes yours are, Arthur; I can't make out their colour

that Hammet and Judith wanted worsted socks. When he was listening in fancy to the 'sea-maid's song,' and weaving thoughts to which a world still stands reverentially to listen, she was buzzing behind him, and bidding him go card the wool, and weeping that, in her girlhood, she had not chosen some rich glover or ale-taster, instead of idle, useless, wayward Willie Shakspeare? Poor fellow! He did not write, I would swear, without fellow-feeling, and yearning, over souls similarly shipwrecked, that wise saw, 'A young man married is a man that's marred.' My dear Arthur, I beg your pardon! I am keeping you a most unconscionable time, but really your eyes are very troublesome. I say, some men are coming here for lansquenet to-night, will you come too? and do bring De Vigne if you can. One sees nothing of him now, and there are few so well worth seeing. *Au revoir, mon cher.* I have an immense deal of work before me. I am going to the Yard to bid for Steel Patterson's cream filly; then to the Twelfth's mess luncheon; next I have an appointment to meet the Godolphin—all town's talking of that fair lady, so I reveal no secret; and *après*, I must dress to dine in Eaton-square; and I much question if any of them are worth the exertion they will cost me, except, indeed, the cream filly!"

Wherewith the Colonel dismissed me. As I saw him that night when De Vigne and I went there for the promised lansquenet, courteous, urbane, gay, nonchalant, witty, I saw no trace of any mysterious secret, nor any lingering touch of the haughty anger and impatient disgust which he had shown to his singular companion of the morning. But then—no more did I see, what all the world said they saw, that Vivian Sabretasche was a heartless libertine, an unprincipled gambler, an egotist, a sceptic, a sinner of the deepest dye, to be condemned immeasurably in boudoir scandals and bishops' dinners, and only to be courted and visited, and have his crimes passed over, because he was rich, and was the fashion.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE LITTLE QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES.

"Arthur, who do you think has gone to the dogs through that rascally British Beggars' Bank?" said De Vigne one

afternoon, unharnessing himself after one of the greatest bores in life—a field-day in Hyde Park—and talking from his bedroom to me, as I sat drinking sherry and seltzer, before going into my rooms in the barracks.

"How should I know, out of half-a-million!"

"Do you remember old Tressillian, of Weive Hurst?"

"Of course. The devil; you don't mean him!"

"I am sorry to say I do! he has lost every penny. To think of that scoundrel, Sir John Lacquers, flinging Bible texts at your head, thrusting his charities into your face, going to church every Sunday as regularly as a verger, and to morning prayers on a week-day, building his almshouses, and attending his ragged schools! And now he's cut off to Boulogne, with a neat surplus, I'll be bound, hidden up somewhere; and widows, and children, and ruined gentlemen will reap the harvest he has sown. Bah! it makes one sick of humanity!"

"And is Tressillian one of his victims?"

"I believe you! I saw his name on the list some days ago, and on Monday I met him with the child that used to be at Weive Hurst—daughter; no, grand-daughter—wasn't she?"

"Little Alma. Yes. We used to say she'd be a pretty woman. Well, go on?"

"I was very pleased to see him. You know I always liked him exceedingly. I asked him where he was living;" he said, with a smile, 'In lodgings, in Surrey-street; you know I can't afford Maurigy's now;' and I called on him there yesterday; such a detestable lodging-house, Arthur! Brummagem furniture and Irish maids! He is just the same simple, courtly old man as ever. I'm not a susceptible fellow; but, I give you my honour, it cut me to the heart to see that gallant old gentleman beggared through that psalm-singing, pharisaical swindler; and bearing his reverses like the plucky French *noblesse* that my father used to shelter at Vigne after the '92."

"And has he nothing now?"

"Nothing. His entire principal was placed in Lacquer's hands; Weive Hurst is gone to pay his creditors, and one can do nothing to aid him: he is so deucedly—no! so *rightly* proud. Come with me to-day and see him; we shall drive there in ten minutes, and we must be doubly attentive to

him now. There will be just time between this and mess, if you ring, and tell them to bring the tilbury round."

The tilbury soon came round, and the new steel greys, tandem, set us down in Surrey-street.

One of the Irish maids who had so excited De Vigne's disgust showed us up-stairs. Tressillian was not at home, but was expected in every minute; and we sat down to wait for him. Through the windows, on those dismal leads which admit to the denizens of Surrey-street a view of the murky Thames and steam transports of the Cockneys, the little girl was standing, who, as soon as she caught sight of De Vigne, ran into the room and welcomed him with exceeding warmth and an accession of colour that might have flattered him much had she been a few years older.

She was about nine or ten, an awkward and angular age; but she had neither angles nor awkwardness, and was as pretty as they ever are in their growing time, with hair of glistening gold, bright in shade as in sunshine, and deep blue eyes, brilliant and dark under her black silken lashes, which promised, in due time, to do a good deal of damage. In her little dainty Paris-mode dress of soft white muslin and floating azure ribbons, the child looked ill-fitted for the gloomy atmosphere of Surrey-street. Poor little thing! a few weeks before she had been the heiress of Weive Hurst, now, thanks, to that goodly creature Sir John Lacquers, her future promised to be a struggle almost for daily bread.

"I am glad you are come!" she exclaimed, running up to De Vigne. "Grandpapa will be pleased to see you, and you will do him good. When he is alone he grows so sad, and I can do nothing to help him. I am no companion for him, and if I try to amuse him—if I sing to him or talk or draw—I think it only makes him worse: he remembers Weive Hurst still more!"

"Do you not miss Weive Hurst, Alma?" asked De Vigne.

The child's eyes filled with tears, and the blood rushed over her face.

"*Miss* Weive Hurst! Oh, you do not guess how much, or you would not ask me! My beautiful, darling home, with its trees, and its flowers, and its sunshine! *Miss* Weive Hurst! In this cold, dark, smoky place, where I never see the sun, or hear the birds, or feel the summer wind!"

And the little lady stopped in her vehement oration, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"What an excitable little thing!" said De Vigne, raising his eyebrows; then he bent gently towards her, as courteously as if she had been a Duchess. "I beg your pardon, Alma; I am sorry if I have vexed you. I could not know how much you loved your home; and, perhaps—who knows—you will go back to it again some day."

She raised her head eagerly.

"Ah! if I could hope that!"

"Well, we *will* hope it!" smiled De Vigne. "Some of those flowers which you love so much, will tell the fairies that sleep in their buds, to come and fetch you back, because they want to see their little Queen."

She looked at him half in surprise.

"Ah! you believe in fairies, then? I love you for that."

"Thank you. Do you, then?"

"Of course," said Alma, with the reproving tone of a believer in sacred creed, to a heathenish sceptic. "Shakspeare did, you know. He writes of Ariel and Puck, Peasblossom and Cobweb, who 'pluck the wings from painted butterflies,' and 'kill cankers in the musk rosebuds.' Milton, too, believed in Fairy Mab, and the Goblin, whose 'shadowy flail had threshed the corn that ten day-labourers could not end.' Flowers would not be half flowers to *me* without their fairies, and, besides," continued Alma, with the decision of a person who clinches an argument, "I have seen them, too?"

"Indeed! But so have I."

"Where?" asked Alma, breathless as a dilettante to whom one breathes tidings of a lost Correggio.

"There!" said De Vigne, lifting her up in his iron grasp before the high mirror on the mantelpiece.

She laughed, but turned upon him with injured indignation.

"What a shame! You do not believe in them—not the least more than grandpapa. I will not love you now—no, never again!"

"My dear child," laughed De Vigne, "even your sex don't love and unlove, *quite* in such a hurry. Don't you care for your grandpapa, then, because he has never seen fairies?"

"Care for grandpapa! Oh yes!" she cried, passionately "as much as I hate—*hate!*—those cruel men who have robbed him of his money. I would try not to care for Weive Hurst if he were happy, but he will never be happy without it any more than I."

"Do you remember me, Alma?" I asked, to change her thoughts.

She shook her head.

"Do you remember him?"

She looked very tenderly and admiringly on De Vigne.

"Oh yes! When I read 'Sintram,' I thought of him as Sir Folko."

De Vigne laughed.

"You bit of a child, what do you understand of 'Sintram?"

"I understand Sir Folko, and I wish I had been Gertrude."

"Then you wish you had been my wife, mademoiselle?"

Alma considered gravely for a moment, looking steadily in De Vigne's face.

"Yes; I think I should like to have you to take care of me, as he took care of Gertrude."

We went off into shouts of laughter, which Alma could not understand. She could not see that she had said anything laughable.

"I thought you were never going to love me again, Alma? A wife ought to love her husband," said De Vigne.

Alma made a *moue mutine* and turned away, her blue ribbons and her gold hair fluttering impatient defiance. Just then her grandfather came in, the stately old master of Weive Hurst.

"How do you do?" cried De Vigne. "I am having an offer made me, Mr. Tressillian, though it is not leap year. I hope you will give your consent?"

"I will never marry anybody who does not believe in fairies!" interrupted Alma, running back again to her leads.

"If she make a like proposal five or six years hence to any man, she'll hardly have it neglected," said I, when Tressillian had recalled who I was, and shaken hands with me.

Tressillian smiled sadly. "Her love will be a curse to her, poor child, for she will love too well; as for her being neglected, she will not have the gilding necessary to make youth protected, beauty appreciated, or talent go down, if she should chance to have the two latter as she grows older."

"Which she is pretty sure to have, unless she alters dreadfully."

Boughton Tressillian sighed. "Yes, she is pretty enough, and she is clever. I believe she already knows much more than young ladies who have just 'finished.' She would learn even better still if she were not so wildly imaginative. *Poverina!* she is ill-fitted to grapple with the world. Whether I spend my few years between four bare walls or not, matters little; but hers——Well, De Vigne, what news to-day? Is the Ministry going to keep in or not?"

De Vigne stayed some half-hour chatting with him, telling him all the amusing *on dits* of the Clubs, and all the fresh political tittle-tattle of the morning, while Tressillian, after that single expression of regret for Alma, alluded no more to his own affairs, and discussed current topics with the intelligence and interest of a man of intellect, entertaining us with the same cheerful ease he had done at Weive Hurst, meeting his reverses with a philosophy of the highest, yet of the simplest order. De Vigne was more courtly, more delicate, more respectful to the ruined gentleman, than he was to many a leader of high ton, for, haughty and imperious on occasion as he was, there was a touch of true chivalry in his character. Go down in the world, De Vigne stretched out his hand to you, be you what you might; rise high, and he cut you, or snubbed you, as he might see fit. De Vigne was not like the world, messieurs!

"How I should enjoy straightening my left arm for the benefit of that cursed hypocrite of the British Beggars' Bank," began De Vigne, tooling the tilbury back again through the Strand; and, so far forgetting himself in his irritation as to venture to use the whip to his wheeler, who revenged the insult by a *pas d'extase*, which produced frightful commotion among the omnibuses, whose conductors swore in inelegant language at "the confounded break-neck nob!" "The morality of the age is too ridiculous! For

the banker's clerk, who, with a sick wife and starving children, yields to one of the fiercest temptations that can beset a man, and takes one drop out of the sea of gold around him, it thinks penal servitude too kind a boon. To the Banker himself, who has reduced forty thousand people to want, the world is lenient, because he stuck his name on missionary lists, and came to public meetings with the Bible on his lips: and, after a little time has slipped away, men will see him installed in a Roman palace, or a Paris hotel, and will flock to his *soirées* by the dozens!"

"Of course; don't you think that if Mephistopheles set up here in Belgravia, and gave the best dinners in London he would get us all to dine with him?"

"To be sure. Men measure you by what you give them. If you're a poor devil with only small beer in your cellar you are ostracized, though you be the best and wisest man in Athens; if you've good claret, they will come and drink it with you, and only discuss your sins behind your back; and if by any chance you have pipefuls of Johannisberg and Tokay, you will have all the cardinal virtues voted to you, without your giving testimony to your even recognizing the cardinal virtues at all! Hallo! gently, gently, Psyche! what a hard mouth she has. Confound her! she will set Cupid off again, and I shall figure in the police reports as taken up for furious driving. I say, what can Tressillian do?"

"Do?"

"Yes. What can he do that I can find him? he is a gentleman and a scholar, but his age shuts him out from any post such as he could ever accept. He has no money—he must do something. I shall talk to Sabretasche; he has no end of interest everywhere if he would only exert it. I think he would if I asked him, so that we might get some pleasant gentlemanlike sinecure for the old man, where he would not have much to remind him painfully of his reverses. I'll see! By the way, Chevasney, have you got your leave? It's a horrid bore, but I can't get mine till August. I wanted it a month earlier."

"To go to Ryde? I knew the last week in June would see the Fantyre and Trefusis transplanted from Bruton-street."

He laughed. "Well, Ryde's very pleasant in its season.

However, we must make up for it among the turnips and stubble; I think my preserves are the best in the county. You must come down, Arthur, I can't do without you; it's a crying cruelty to coop military men up in the shooting season; besides, you are a great pet of my mother's."

"Doesn't she ever come to town?"

"Oh, yes; but her health is delicate. She has no daughters to bring out, and I think she prefers the country in the spring and summer. Here one loses summer altogether. We don't know such a word; it is merged into the Season, and the flowers grow on ladies bonnets instead of meadow lands. Well! I like it best. I prefer society to solitude. St. Simon Stylites had very fine meditations, I dare say, and a magnificent bird's-eye view of the country; but I must say Rabelaisian Philosophies would seem more like life to me, and I fancy I see more of human nature in the Pré Catalan than the Prairies."

"Yet you go mad after nature sometimes, you odd fellow?"

"Of course. There is a grandeur about the wide stretch of sea in a sunny dawn, or the sweep of hills and birch woods on a Highland moor, besides which the fret and flippery of human life are miserably insignificant. No man, who has any manhood in him at all, but feels the better for the fresh rush of a mountain wind. But for all that, I am neither poet nor philosopher enough, to live with nature always, and forswear the coarser elements of life; lansquenet, racing, Coralies, champagne, and all one's other habitual agréments. Hang it, Arthur, why do you set me defining; can't you let me *enjoy?* Ten years hence I will theorize on life as much as you please, just now I prefer taking it as it comes. There! we did the distance in no time."

If De Vigne set his mind on doing anything, whether it was taking a cropper, or winning a woman, hooking a salmon, or canvassing a county, he never rested till it was done; therefore, having taken Boughton Tressillian's cause steadily to heart, he set all the levers going which were available, to find something suitable to the old man's broken fortunes and refined tastes. He never let Sabretasche alone till the Colonel, who knew everybody, used his interest too, a thing he detested doing, because, as he said, *it* "gives you so

hemlock rather than have coupled the Badminton with *her* name. Ah, well, mes frères! he is not the only man for whom the name that rang so sweetly, breathed in the toast of love, has chimed a bitter death-knell through all his after-life!

The Trefusis did her best to lure him into "definite action" that night, as he sat by her at dinner; and leaned out of the window afterwards beside her; the delicate perfume of her hair mingling with the fragrance of roses and heliotropes from the garden below, the low jug-jug of the nightingale joining with their own low voices, and the summer starlight gleaming on both their faces—his, impassioned, eager, earnest; hers, fair indeed, but fair with the beauty of the rock-crystal, which will melt neither for wintry frost nor tropic sunshine. She did her best; and the hour and the scene alike favoured her. She bent forward; she looked up in his face, and the moon's rays gave to her eyes a liquid sweetness never their own: he began to lose control over himself; the passion within him took the reins; he who all his life through had denied himself nothing; neither knew nor cared how to check it. He bent towards the Trefusis, his fiery pulses beating loud; while his moustaches touched her brow: Heaven knows what he might have said, but I went up to them, ruthlessly:

"De Vigne, the horses are put to, and Miss Trefusis wants to be in town by eleven, in time for Mrs. Delany's ball; everybody's gone or going."

A fierce oath was muttered under his moustaches—he can be fiery enough if he's crossed. The Trefusis gave me a look—well! such as you, madame, will never give a man, if you are prudent, even though he be your lover's *fidus Achates*, and comes in just when he is not wanted. Then she rose, drawing on her gloves with a sweet, courteous smile:

"Oh! thank you, Mr. Chevasney; how kind of you to come and tell us! I would not be late at dear Mrs. Delany's for the world; you know she is a very pet friend of mine."

I had saved him that time, and, idiot-like, triumphed at my success. Might I not have known that no forty-horse power can keep a man from committing himself, if he is bent upon it? and might I not have known that if a fellow entered himself for any stakes with a woman, she will have cantered in and carried off the Cup before he has saved half

nce, let him pride himself upon his jockeyship never
y?
saved De Vigne, and I don't think he bore me any
ll for it, for he drove me and a couple of other
ck in his phaeton to Kensington, in gloomy silence.
ld not go to Mrs. Delany's, for the best of all reasons
he was not asked. Ladies never *do* invite with
et friends the quarry their pet friends are trying the
t to lure; not from envy, pretty little dears!—who
think of accusing them of *that?* Do they ever, by
ance break the Tenth Commandment, and covet their
bour's carriage, horses, appointments, diamonds, point,
ions, or anything that she has?
d the day after that the Trefusis went down to Ryde,
ive the yachting men distracted.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE FORGING OF THE FETTERS.

What De Vigne did or did not do at Ryde I knew not. the 31st of August, however, I found myself swinging n in the express to his own place in the south.
Vigne was about eighty miles from London; a pretty, turesque village, of which nearly every rood belonged to n; and his park was almost as magnificent a sweep of d as Holcombe or Longleat. It was with something rmer than pride, that he looked across, over his wide odlands glowing in the sunset, the great elm-trees rowing their wide cool shadows far over the rich pasture d beneath; the ferns, high as a man's elbow, waving in e breeze; the deer trooping away into the deep forest ades; and the lengthened avenues, stretching off in aisles burnished green and gold, like one of Creswick's Eng-h landscapes. A mile and a half of one of those agnificent elm-avenues brought us to the house, which s more like Hardwick Hall in exterior than any other ace I know, standing grandly, too, something as Hardwick es; but in interior, luxurious and modern to the last egree, with every elegance and comfort which upholstery nd science have taught the nineteenth century to look pon as absolute requirements.

much trouble, and lays you under Obligation; a debt nobody ever allows you to forget that you owe them." To please De Vigne, however, he exerted himself; and between them they procured a consulate for Tressillian, at a large pleasant town on the Mediterranean shore, which had of late years become almost an English settlement, "whose climate was exquisite, scenery perfect, combined with admirable English and Italian society," according to the elegant language of the guide-books, who told no lies about it for a wonder.

Anybody who wanted to see the side of De Vigne's character that made those who really knew him love him with the love of Jonathan for David, should have seen him offering his consulship to Tressillian, with the most delicate tact and feeling, so that the ruined gentleman could feel no obligation which could touch his pride, and could receive it only as a thoughtful forestalling of his wishes. That Tressillian felt it deeply I could see, but De Vigne refused all thanks, and the old man felt the kindness all the deeper for his disclaimer of it. "You are a noble fellow," he said heartily; "you will find your reward some day."

"My dear sir," laughed De Vigne—when he felt things at all he generally turned them off in a jest—"I get many more rewards than I deserve, I fancy; my life's all prizes and no blanks, except now and then, the blank of satiety. I am not one of those who 'do good and blush to find it known;' for the simple reason that I never do any good at all, and have not blushed since I was seven, and fell in love with my mother's lady's-maid, a most divine Frenchwoman, with gold ear-rings, who eventually took up with the butler —bad taste, after me, was it not? You won't desert me for anybody I hope, Alma? You will see sublime Italians at Lorave."

"They will not be as handsome as you are, Sir Folko," responded Alma Tressillian, with frank admiration.

"Thank you, *cher enfant;* you will teach me to blush if you flatter me so much. Will you take me in, Alma, if I and my yacht call upon you at any time?"

"Oh, do! do!" cried Alma vehemently, "and sail me on the sea, and I will show you the mermaids under the waves, with their necklets of sea-shells, and their fans of pink weed! You will see them, indeed you will, if you will only believe in them!"

"Most apt illustration of faith," laughed De Vigne. "People see tables turn, and violins dance with broom-sticks, and hear Shakspeare talk through a loo-table, by sheer force of believing in them! When will that child ever learn to come down to the coarse realities of everyday existence?"

"No," said Tressillian, "I am afraid I have hardly taken the best way of educating her for the real world. She should have gone to school, to learn the sober practicalities, and wise inanities of English schoolgirls. Her solitary life, with books and flowers, has encouraged the enthusiasm, and imagination, which come, I suppose, with her foreign blood; but then, I always thought she would be raised above heeding, or considering, the world! much more above ever working in it!"

A few days afterwards, Tressillian, with his granddaughter and an English governess he had engaged for her, set off for Lorave. De Vigne and I saw them at the South-Eastern station, and little Alma cried as bitterly at parting with him as any of the women who loved him could have done; only the tears were not got up for effect, and washed off no rouge, like most of theirs! De Vigne consoled her with the promise of a yachting trip to Lorave, and came away from the station to drive the Trefusis down to dinner at the Star and Garter, where he gave an entertainment of which the Trefusis was undisputed Queen, and looked it too, drinking Badminton with much the same air as Juno must have worn drinking Ambrosia, and outshining all the women in beauty, and figure, and toilette: for which the women of course hated her, and respected her in one breath: for, cordially as a lady detests a handsome sister, it is notable that she no less despises an ill-dressed or ugly one. To be handsome a woman thinks an unpardonable crime in her rival; but to be plain is a most contemptible *faux pas!*

I can remember De Vigne now, sitting at the head of the table, that bright June evening, at Richmond. How happy he looked!—his forehead flushed with pleasure and triumph, his eyes flashing fire, or beaming softness and tenderness on the Trefusis, his voice ringing out with a careless, happy, harmony. Life's best gifts seemed to lurk for him in that goblet of Claret Cup, which he lifted to his lips, with a fond pledge (by the eyes) to the woman he loved. Yet, if he had known his future, he would have filled the glass with

And she bent her head and sobbed bitterly. May we believe with Madame de Girardin?—

"C'est en vain que l'on nomme erreur,
Cette secrète intelligence,
Qui portant la lumière au fond,
Sur des maux ignorés nous fait gémir d'avance!"

De Vigne bent his head, and kissed her. It was very rarely he saw his mother's tears; and in proportion to their rarity they always touched him. They were both of them silent. The next question she asked, came with the resignation of a woman, to a man whose purpose she knew she could never alter, or even sway, any more than she could stir the elm-trees in the avenues, from the beds that they had lain in for lengthened centuries.

"You really love her, then?"

"More passionately than I have ever loved a woman yet!"

That sealed the sentence. Lady Flora knew, that never in love, as in sport, had De Vigne checked his fancy, or turned back from his quarry.

"God help you then!"

He started back at the uncalled for prayer; it was an involuntary utterance of the trembling tenderness, the undefined dread with which she regarded his future. He smiled down gaily at her. "Why, mother, what is there so dreadful in love? One would think you thought shockingly of your sex, to view my first thought of marriage, through smoked glasses."

She tried to smile. "It is such a lottery!"

"Of course it is; but so are all games of chance; and if one ventures nothing, one may go without play all one's life. As for happiness, *that* is at very uncertain odds at all times, and the only wise thing one can do is to enjoy the present. Does not La Bruyère tell us that no man ever married yet, who did not in twelve month's time wish he had never seen his wife? It is true enough for that matter; so that, whether one does it sooner or later, one is equally certain to repent." He spoke with a light laugh and a fearless confidence in his own future which went to his mother's heart. She took both his hands in hers.

"Granville, you know I never seek to interfere with your opinions, plans, or actions. You are a man of the

world, far fitter to judge for yourself than I am to judge for you; but no one can love you better than I?"

"Indeed no," said De Vigne tenderly, "none so well."

"And no one cares for your future life as I? Therefore will you listen to me for a minute?"

"Sixty, if you like."

"Then, tell me," said his mother gently, "do you really think yourself that you are fitted for married life, or married life fitted for you?"

"Don't put it in that way!" cried De Vigne impatiently. "Married life? No! not if I were chained down into dull domesticity; but in our position marriage makes little or no difference in our way of life. We keep the same society, have the same diversions as before. We are not chained together like two galley-slaves, toiling away at one oar, without change of scene or of companion. She must be my wife, because if she is not, I shall go mad; but she is no woman only fit 'to suckle fools and chronicle small beer,' and she would be the last to deprive me of that liberty, of which, you are quite right in thinking, I should chafe incessantly at the loss! But I am talking myself, not listening to you. What else are you going to say?"

"I was going to say—are you sure you will never love again?"

De Vigne grew impatient again. He threw back his head! these were not pleasant suggestions to him.

"Really, my dear mother, you are looking very far into futurity! How can I, or any man, by any possibility, answer such a question? We are not gods to foresee what lies before us. I know that I love now—love more deeply than I have ever done yet, and that is enough for me!"

"That is not enough for me," answered his mother, with a heavy sigh. "I can foresee your future, for I know your nature, your mind, your heart. You will marry now, in the mad passion of the hour; marry as a thousand men do, giving up their birthright of free choice and liberty, and an open future, for a mess of porridge of a few hours' delight! I know nothing of Miss Trefusis, nor do I wish to say anything against her, but I know *you*. You marry her, no doubt, from eye-love; for her magnificent beauty, which report says is unrivalled. After a time that beauty will grow stale and tame to you; it will not be your fault; men

are born inconstant, and eye-love expires, when the eye has dwelt long enough on it, to grow tired and satiated. Have you not, times out of number, admired and wearied before, Granville? Then there will come long years of regret, impatience of the fetters once joyfully assumed; perhaps, for you require sympathy and comprehension, miserable years of wrangling and reproaches, such as you are least fitted of all men to endure. You will see that your earlier judgment was crude, your younger taste at fault; *then*, with your passions strengthened, your discernment matured, you will love again—love with all the tenderness, the depth of later years, to find the crowning sorrow of your life, or to drag another in to share the curse you have already brought upon yourself. Can you look steadily at such a future?"

A chill of ice passed through his veins as he heard her—the true foreshadowing of a most bitter doom! Then he threw the presentiment off, and his hot blood flowed on again in its wild and fiery course; he answered her passionately and decidedly.

"Yes! I have no fear of any evil coming to me through my love. If she will, she shall be my wife, and whatever my future be, I accept it."

The day after our arrival I found the reason for De Vigne's throwing over Brighton for his own home. The Trefusis and Lady Fantyre came down to stay at Follet, a place some three or four miles from Vigne, with some friends of the Fantyre, whose acquaintance she had made on the Continent; people whom he knew but slightly, but whom he now cultivated, more than he generally troubled himself to do, much more exclusive members of that invariably stiltified, stuck-up, and pitiably-toaded thing, the County.

The 1st of September came, gray, soft, still, as that delightful epoch of one's existence always should, and up with the dawn we swallowed seltzer or coffee, devils or omelettes, too hastily to appreciate them, and went out, in a large party; for Sabretasche had come there the night before, with several other men, to knock the birds over, in De Vigne's princely preserves. What magic is there in sport to make us so mad after it? A strange charm there *is*—a charm we enjoy too much to analyse; and De Vigne, whose head and heart were full of different game, and Sabretasche, who

hated rising before two P.M., alike swore to the truth of it, with the dogs and the beaters around them in the open, or lying in the shade of some great hedge-trees, discussing Bass and a cold luncheon, with more appetite than they ever had for the most delicious breakfast at the Maison Dorée or the daintiest *hors d'œuvre* at Tortoni's.

When twilight had put an end to the everlonged-for First, and we had returned to the bachelor's wing to dress for dinner, I met De Vigne, and he put his hand on my shoulder.

"Well, Arthur, hadn't we awfully good drives? Isn't it beautiful to see Sabretasche knock down the rocketers, such a lazy fellow as he is, too?"

"He's not a better shot than you?"

"Don't you think so? But then he's a disciple of the dolce, and I always go hard at anything I take in hand."

"You don't sell your game?" I asked, knowing I might just as well ask him if he sold hot potatoes!

"Sell it? No, thank you; I am not a poulterer! I have sport, not trade; the fellows who sell the birds their friends help them to kill, should write up over their lodge-gates, 'Game sold here, by men who would like to be thought gentlemen, but find it a losing concern.' I would as soon send my trees up to London for building purposes as my partridges to Leadenhall. The fellows who do that sort of thing must have some leaven of old Lombards, or Chepe goldsmiths in them; and though they have an Escutcheon instead of a Sign now, can't get rid of the trader's instinct!"

I loved to set De Vigne up on his aristocratic stilts, they were so deliciously contradictory to the radical opinions he was so fond of enunciating! The fact was, he was an aristocrat at his heart, a radical by his head, and the two Creeds sometimes had a tilt, and upset one another.

"Is anybody coming to dinner to-night?" I was half-afraid somebody was, whom I detested to see near him at all.

"Yes," he answered curtly. "There are the Levisons, Lady Fantyre, and Miss Trefusis, Cavendish and Ashton."

For my life I couldn't help a long whistle, I was so savage at that woman getting the better of us all so cleverly!

"The deuce! De Vigne, your mother and that nasty, gambling, story-telling old Fantre will hardly run in couples?"

pitied; and men who buy toys at such low prices are little to be censured for not estimating their goods very high. The price of a virtuous woman is rarely above rubies; it has only this difference, that the rubies set as a bracelet will suffice for Coralie, while they must go round a coronet to win Lady Blanche! *A propos!*—whatever other silly things you do, Chevasney, never make an early marriage."

"I never intend, I assure you," I said, tartly. I thought he might have heard of Gwendolina, and be poking fun at me; and Gwen, I knew, was not for me, but for M. le Duc de Vieillecour, a poor, wiry, effete old beau, who had been about Charles X.

"Very well, so far; but you need not look so indignant, no man can tell into what he may be drawn. No one is so secure, but that next year he may commit the sin he utterly ridicules this. Look at De Vigne; six months past he would have laughed in your face if you had spoken to him of marriage. Now he would be tempted to knock you down if you attempted to dissuade him *from* marriage! What will he gain by it; what won't he lose? If she were a charming woman, he would lose his liberty, his pleasant bachelor life, his power of disposing of himself how and where he chooses, without query or comment. With a woman like the Trefusis he will lose more; he will lose his peace, his self-respect, his belief in human nature; and it will be well if he lose not his honour! He will have always beside him a wife from whom his whole soul revolts, but to whom his hot-headed youth has fettered him, till one or the other shall lie in the grave. There is no knowing to what madness, what misery, his early marriage may not lead him, to what depths of hopelessness, or error, it may not drag him. Were he a weak man, he would collapse under her rein, and be henpecked, cheated, and cajoled; being a strong one, he will rebel, and, still acting and seeing for himself, he will find out in too short a time, that he has sacrificed himself, and life, and name, to—a Mistake."

He spoke so earnestly for the listless, careless, nonchalant, indolent Sabretasche, that I stared at him, for he was almost proverbially impassive; he caught my eye, and laughed.

"What do you think of my sermon, Arthur? Bear it in mind if you are in danger, that is all. Will you come out into the card-room, and have a game at écarté? You play

wonderfully well for so young as you are; but then you say a Frenchman taught you? I hate to play with a man who cannot beat me tolerably often; there is no excitement without difficulty. The Trefusis knows that! Look at her flirting with Monckton in her stately style, while De Vigne stands by, looks superbly indifferent, and chafes all the time like a hound held in leash, while another is pulling down the stag!"

"She will not make you happy, Granville!" said his mother that night, when De Vigne bid her good night in her dressing-room, as was his invariable custom.

He answered her stiffly. "It is unfortunate you are all so prejudiced against her."

"I am not prejudiced," she answered with a bitter sigh. "Heaven knows how willingly I would try to love any one who loves you, but a woman's intuition sees farther sometimes than a man's discernment can penetrate, and in Miss Trefusis, beyond beauty of form and feature, I see nothing that will satisfy you: there is no beauty of mind, no beauty of heart! The impression she gives me is, that she is an able schemer, a clever actress, quick to seize on the weak points of those around her, and turn them to her own advantage; but that she is—forgive me!—illiterate, ambitious, and heartless!"

"You wrong her and you wrong yourself!" broke in De Vigne, passionately. "Your anxiety for me warps alike your own penetration and charity of feeling. I should have thought you were above such injustice!"

"I only wish I may do her injustice," answered his mother, gravely. "But oh, Granville, I fear—I fear! Dearest, do not be angry, none will ever love you more unselfishly than I! If I tremble for your future, it is only that I know your character so well. I know all that, as years go on, your mind will require, your heart exact, from the woman who is your wife. I know how quickly the glamour fades in the test of constant intercourse. A commonplace, domestic woman would drive you from her side to another's; a hard tyrannous, beautiful woman will freeze you into ice, like herself. I, who love you so dearly, how can I look calmly on to see the shipwreck of your life? My darling! my darling! I would almost as soon hear that you had died on a battle-field, as your father did before you, as

bear that you had given your fate into that woman's hands!"

His mother's tenderness and grief touched De Vigne deeply; he knew how well she loved him, and that this was the first time she had sought to cross his will, but—he stooped and kissed her with fond words, and rose, of the same persuasion still! It were as easy to turn the west wind from its course, as it sweeps wild and free over the sea and land, as by words or counsel, laws or warnings, to attempt to stem the self-willed, headlong current of a man's mad passion.

Had any whispered warning to Acis of his fate, would he have ever listened or cared when, in the sunset glow, he saw the witching gleam of Galatea's golden hair? When the son of Myrha gazed up into the divine eyes, and felt his own lips glow at the touch of "lava kisses," could he foresee, or, had he foreseen, would he have ever heeded, the dark hour when he should lie dying, on those same Idalian shores?

The Trefusis played her cards ably. A few days after she played her ace of trumps, and her opponents were obliged to throw up their hands. De Vigne did not ask his mother to invite her and Lady Fantyre there; infatuated though he was, and wisely careless on such subjects generally, I think he felt that the old *ci-devant* orange-girl, with her nasty stories, her dingy reputation, and her clever tricks with the four honours, was not a guest suitable to his high-born, high-bred mother. But a day or two after was his birthday, a day which, contrary to his own taste, but in accordance with old habit, had been celebrated, whether he was present or not, with wonderful éclat and magnificence. This year, as usual, "the County," and parts of surrounding counties, too, came to a dinner and ball at Vigne; and since the Levisons had been included in the invitations a month before we went down, now, of course, the Trefusis would accompany them.

As De Vigne had not even the slight admixture of Roger de Coverley benevolence assumed by some county men at the present time, as he had not the slightest taste for oats or barley, did not care two straws how his farms went or how his lands were let, and hated toadying and flummery as cordially as he hated bad wine, the proceedings of the day very naturally bored him immensely; and he threw himself down, after replying to his tenants' speeches, on one of the

couches of the smoking-room, with an anathema on the whole thing.

"What a happy fellow you are, Sabretasche!" said he to the Colonel, who had retired from the scene to one of the sofas with a pile of periodicals and a case of genuine Manillas. "You have nothing on your hands but your town-house, that you can shut up, and your Highland lodge, where you can leave your dogs for ten months in the year; and have no yeomanry, tenants, and servants, to look to you yearly for sirloins and October, and a speech that is more trouble to make than fifty parliamentary ones!"

"Ah! my dear fellow," yawned Sabretasche, "I did stay in that tent pitying you beyond measure, till my feelings and my nerves couldn't stand seeing you martyrized, and scenting that very excellent beef, and hearing those edifying cheers any longer; so, as I couldn't help *you*, I took compassion on myself, shut myself up with the magazines, and thanked Heaven I was not born to that desideratum—'a fine landed property!'"

De Vigne laughed.

"Well, it's over now! I shouldn't mind it so much if they wouldn't talk such bosh to one's face—praising me for my liberality and noble-mindedness, and calling me public spirited and generous, and Heaven knows what. They're a good-hearted set of fellows, though, I believe——"

"Possibly," said Sabretasche; "but what extent of good-heartedness can make up for those dreadfully broad o's and a's, and those terrific 'Sunday-going suits,' and those stubble-like heads of hair plastered down with oil?"

"Not to you, you confounded refiner of refined gold," laughed De Vigne. "By-the-bye, Sabretasche, don't you sometimes paint lilies in your studio? That *raffiné* operation would suit you to a T. I suppose you never made love to a woman who was not the ultra-essence of good breeding and Grecian outline?"

Sabretasche gave a sort of shudder; at some recollection, or at the simple suggestion.

"Well," said De Vigne; "Cupid has a vernacular of his own which levels rank sometimes; a pretty face, is a pretty face, whether it is under a Paris bonnet, or a cottage straw. But what I hate so, is this sort of affair, is the false light in which it makes one stand. Here am I, who don't see Vigne

for nine months out of the year, sometimes not at all, who delegate all the bother of it to my steward, who neither knows nor care when the rents are paid, nor how the lands are divided, cheered by these people as if I were a sort of god and king over them—and, deuce take them! they mean it, too! Their fathers' fathers worshipped my fathers' fathers, and so they, in a more modern fashion, cheer and toast me as if I were a combined Cincinnatus and Titus! You know well enough I am nothing of the kind! I don't think I have a spark of benevolence in my composition. I could no more get up an interest in model cottages, and prize fruit, than I could in Cochin-Chinas or worsted work, and the consequence is that I feel a humbug, and instead of returning thanks to-day to my big farmers, and my small retainers, I should have liked to have said to them, 'My good fellows, you are utterly mistaken in your man. I am glad you are doing well, and I won't let any of you be ground down if I know it; but otherwise I don't care a jot about any of you, and this annual affair is a very great bore to me, whatever it may be to you; and I take this opportunity of assuring you that, far from being a demigod, I am a very graceless cavalry man, and instead of doing any good with my twenty thousand a year, I only make ducks and drakes of it as fast as I possibly can.' If I had said that to them, I should have relieved myself, had no more toadying, and felt that the Vigneites and I understood one another. What a horrid bother it is one can't tell truth in the world!"

"Most people find the bother lie, in having to tell the truth occasionally!" said the Colonel, with his enigmatical smile. "*You* might enjoy having, like Fénelon's happy islanders, only to open your eyes to let your thoughts be read, but I am afraid such an *exposé* would hardly suit most of us. You don't agree with Talleyrand, that language is given us to conceal our thoughts?"

De Vigne looked at him as he poked up his pipe.

"Devil take you, Sabretasche! Who is to know what you mean, or what you think, or what you are?"

"My dear fellow," said the Colonel, cutting the *Westminster* slowly with one hand, and taking out his cigar with the other, "nobody, I hope, for *I* agree with Talleyrand, if you don't."

The County came—a few to dinner, many to the ball, presenting all the varied forms of that peculiar little oligarchy; a Duke, two Marquises, two Earls, four or five Barons, high-dried, grand old Dowagers, with fresh, pretty-looking daughters as ready for fun and flirtation as their maids; stiltified County Queens, with daughters long on hand, who had taken refuge in High-Churching their village, and starched themselves very stiff in the operation. Pretty married women, who waltzed in a nutshell, and had many more of us after them than the girls. County beauties, accustomed to carry all before them at race balls if not at Almack's, and to be Empresses at archery fêtes if they were only units in Belgravia. Hunting Baronets, who liked the music of the pack when they threw up their heads, much better than the music of D'Albert's waltzes. Members with the down hardly on their cheeks; other Members, whose mission seemed to lie much more in the saddle than the benches. Rectors by the dozen, who found a village dance on the green sinful, but a ball at Vigne a very pardonable error; scores of military men, who flirted more desperately and meant less by it than any fellows in the room; all the County, in fact, and among them little old Fantyre, with her hooked nose, and her queer reputation, her dirty, priceless lace, and her jewels got nobody knew how, and her daughter, neice, or companion, the *intrigante*, the interloper, but decidedly the belle of the rooms, the handsome and naughty Trefusis. Superbly, in truth, she looked in some dress, as light and brilliant as summer clouds, with the rose tint of sunset on them, while her eyes, dark and lustrous as an Eastern's, shot their dangerous languid glances. One could hardly wonder that De Vigne offended past redemption the Ladies-in-their-own-right, all the great heiresses, all the County princesses royal, all the archery-party beauties; and—careless of rank, right, or comment—opened the ball with the Trefusis. It was her crowning-triumph, and she knew it. She knew that what he dared to begin, he would dare to follow out, and that the more censure he provoked, the more certainly would he persevere in his own will.

"We have lost the game!" said Sabretasche to me, as he passed me, waltzing with Adelina Ferrers.

It was true. De Vigne was then waltzing that same valse

with her; whirling her round the white lilies of her *bouquet le corsage* crushed against his breast; her forehead resting on his shoulder, his moustaches touching her hair as he whispered in her ear, his face glad, proud, eager, impassioned; while the County feminine sneered, and whispered behind their fans, "What could De Vigne possibly see in that woman?" and the County masculine swore what a deuced fine creature she was, and wondered what Trefusis she might be?

Then—that waltz over—De Vigne gave her his arm, and led her out of the ball-room to take some ice, and then strolled on with her into the conservatories, which, thanks to Lady Flora, were brilliant as the glories of the tropics, and odorous as a rich Indian night, with their fragrance exhaling from citron and cypress groves, and their heavy clusters of magnolias and mangoes. There, in that atmosphere, that hour, so sure to banish prudence and fan the fires of passion; there, to the woman beside him, glorious as one of the West Indian flowers above their heads, but chill and unmoved at heart as one of their brilliant and waxen petals—De Vigne poured out in terse and glowing words the love she had so strangely awakened, laying generously and trustfully, as a knight of old laid his spoils and his life, at his queen's feet, his home, his name, his honour before the woman he loved. And she simulated tenderness to perfection; she threw it into her lustrous eyes, she forced it into her blushing cheek, it trembled in her softened voice, it glanced upwards under her dark lashes. It was all a lie, but a lie marvellously acted:—and while he bent over her, covering her lips with passionate caresses, drinking in with every breath a fresh draught of intoxication, his heart beating loud and quick with the triumph of success, was it a marvel that he forgot his past, his future, his own experience, others' warnings, anything and everything, save the Present, in its full and triumphant delirium?

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE BLOW THAT A WOMAN DEALT.

"I say, Arthur—she has outwitted us!"

"The devil she has, Colonel!"

"Who would have believed him so mad?"

"Who would have believed her so artful?"

"Chevasney, men are great fools!"

"And women wonderful actresses, Colonel!"

"Right; but it is a cursed pity."

"That De Vigne is taken in, or that women are embodied lies, sir—which?"

"Both!"

And with his equanimity most unusually ruffled, Sabretasche turned away out of the ball-room, which De Vigne and the Trefusis, after a prolonged absence, had just re-entered; his face saying plainly enough, that his cause was won; hers telling as clearly, that the estate and its master were captured.

When the dawn was rising, and the great gates had closed after the carriage-wheels, De Vigne went to his mother in her dressing-room. He wished to tell, yet he shrank from paining her—it came out with a jerk at last—"My mother, wish me joy! I have won her, and *I* have no fear!"

And when his mother fully realized his words, she burst into the most bitter tears that she had ever shed for him; for whatever in his whole life his faults might be to others, in his conduct to his mother he had none. He let her tears have their way; he hardly knew how to console her; he only put his arm gently round her, as if to assure her that no wife should ever come between herself and him. When she raised her head she was deathly pale—pale, as if the whole of his future hung a dead and hopeless weight upon her. She said no more against it; it was done, and she was both too wise, and loved him too truly, to vex and chafe him with useless opposition. But she threw her arms round him, and kissed him long and breathlessly, as she had kissed him in his child's cot long ago, thinking of his father lying dead on the Indian shore with the colours for his shroud.

"My darling! my darling! God bless you! God give you a happy future, and a wife who will love you, as you can love—will love!"

That passionate broken prayer was all his mother ever said to him of his marriage.

De Vigne received few congratulations; but that sort of thing was quite contrary to his taste, and on opposition, none of his relatives, not even the overbearing, knock-me-down, Marchioness of Marquetrie, who gave the law to everybody, dared to venture. She only expressed her opinion by ordering her own carriage for the hour, and the day, at which the Trefusis came for the first time to stay at Vigne. Lady Flora treated the Trefusis with a generous courtesy, which did its best to grow into something warmer, and watched her with a wistful anxiety which was very touching. But it was evident to every one that the two could never assimilate, or even approach one another. This careful courtesy was all that would ever link them together, and, in this instance at least, the extresme did *not* touch.

However, for the three weeks longer, that I remained there, on the surface all went on remarkably smooth. The Ferrers, of course, had left with their mother. The Trefusis, in manner, was irreproachable. Sabretasche was infinitely too polished a gentleman, to show disapproval of what he had no business with: and limited himself to an occasional satiric remark on her, so veiled in subtle wit and courtesy, that, shrewd as she was, she felt the sting, but could not find the point of attack clearly enough to return it. De Vigne, of course, saw everything in a rose light, and only chafed with impatience at the probation of an engagement; and his mother resigned herself to the inevitable, and did her very best, poor lady! to find out some trace of that beauty of heart, thought, and mind, which her delicate feminine instinct told her, was wanting in the magnificent personal gifts with which nature had enriched the woman who was to be his wife.

So all went harmoniously on at Vigne throughout that autumn; and the County talked themselves hoarse, speculating on his union with an unknown, with no rank, prestige, history, or anything to entitle her to such an honour, in whom, whether she was daughter or *protégée* of that disreputable old woman, Sarah Lady Fantyre, Society could decide nothing for certain, nor make out anything at all satisfactory. No wonder the County were up in arms, and hardly knew which to censure the most—De Vigne for

daring to make such a misalliance, or the Trefusis for daring to accept it! And the Colonel thought with the County.

"If I ever took the trouble (which I don't, because hate is an exhausting and silly thing) to hate anybody, it would be that remarkably handsome and remarkably detestable Trefusis," said Sabretasche, as he wrapped a plaid round his knees on the box of the drag, which was to convey him and me to the station, to take the train for those grass countries, well-beloved of every Englishman for the mere name of Pytchley, whither Sabretasche was going down for the five weeks that still remained of his leave, having invited me to accompany him; and where I enjoyed myself uncommonly, managing most days to be in at the finish, by dint of following that best of mottoes, for which we are indebted to the best Master of Hounds who ever went to cover, "Throw your heart over, and your horse will follow!"

Each hour I spent with him I grew more attached to the Colonel; the longer I saw him in his own house, so perfect a gentleman, so perfect a host; the longer I listened to his easy and playful talk on men and things, his subtle and profound satire on hypocrisies and follies. It was impossible not to get, as ladies say, fond of Sabretasche; his courtly urbanity, his graceful generosity, his ready wit, all made him so charming a companion; though of the real man it was difficult, as De Vigne said, to judge, through the nonchalance, indolence, and impassiveness, with which the Colonel chose to veil all that he said or did. He might have some secret or other in his past life, or his present career, which no man ever knew; he might be only, what he said he was, an idler, a trifler, a dilettante, a blasé and tired man of the world, a nil admirari-ist. Nobody could tell. Only this I could see, gay, careless, indolent though he was, that in spite of the refined selfishness, the exquisite epicureanism, the voluptuous enjoyment of life which his friends and foes attributed to him, Vivian Sabretasche, like most of the world's merry-makers, was sometimes sad enough at heart.

"Friends? I don't believe in friends, my dear boy," said the Colonel, one night when we sat over the fire, after a splendid burst over the country, up wind, fifteen minutes alone with the hounds; and a kill in the open. "There

are hundreds of good fellows who like Vivian Sabretasche and run after him because he amuses them, and is a little of the fashion, and is held a good judge of their wine, and their stud, and their pictures. But let Vivian Sabretasche come to grief to-morrow, let his Lares go to the Jews, and his Penates to the devil; let the Clubs, instead of quoting black-ball him, and the *Post*, instead of putting him in the Fashionable Intelligence, cite him among the Criminal Cases, which of his bosom friends will be so anxious then to take his arm down St. James's-street? Which of them all will invite and flatter him then? Will Orestes send him haunches of venison? Will Iolaüs uncork his Comet wine for him, and Pylades stretch out his hand to him, and pick his fallen pride out of the dirt of the gutter, and fight his battle for him when he has crippled himself? Pshaw! my dear Arthur, I take men at my valuation, not at their own. Don't you know—

'Si vous êtes dans la détresse
O mes amis, cachez-le bien,
Car l'homme est bon et s'intéresse
A ceux qui n'ont besoin de rien!'"

"It is a sad doctrine, Colonel," said I, who was a boy and wished to disbelieve him.

He laughed a little. "Sad? Oh, I don't see that; nothing in life is worth calling sad. According to Heraclitus, everything is sad; according to Democritus nothing is sad. The true secret is to take things as they come, and not trouble yourself sufficiently about anything to give it power to trouble you. Enjoy your youth. Take, mine and your school-friend Ovid's counsel—

'Utendum est ætate. Cito pede labitur ætas. . . .
Hac mihi de spina grata corona data est.'"

"But how's one to keep clear of the thorns?"

"By flying butterfly-like, from rose to rose, and handling it so delicately, as not to give it time to prick you! Love makes a poetic and unphilosophic man, like Dante or Petrarca, unhappy; but do you suppose that Lauzun, Grammont, the Duc de Richelieu, were ever made unhappy by love? No, the very idea makes one laugh; the poets took it seriously, and suffered in consequence; the courtiers only made it their pastime, and enjoyed it pro-

portionately. It all depends on the way one lays hold of the roses of life: some men only enjoy the dew and fragrance of the flower, others mismanage it somehow, and get only the thorns."

"You've the secret, then, Colonel," said I, laughing, "for you get a whole conservatory of the most delicious under the sun, and not a thorn, I'd bet, among them?"

"Or, at all events, my skin is hard enough not to be pricked," smiled Sabretasche. "I think many men begin life, like the sand on the top of a drum, which obeys every undulation of the air from the notes of a violin near; they are sensitive and susceptible, shrinking at wrong or injury, easily moved, quickly touched. As years go on, the same men are like the same sand when it has been pressed, and hardened, and burnt in fusion heat, and exposed to frosty air, and made into polished, impenetrable glass, on which you can make no impression, off whose icy surface everything glides away, and which it is impossible to cut with the hardest and keenest of knives. The sand is the same sand; it is the treatment it has met with that has changed it. How I do prose to you, Arthur!—and of all the ills, a man has least right to inflict on another, are his own theories or ideas! Fill your glass, my boy, and pass me those macaroons. How can those poor creatures live who don't know of the Marcobrunnen and Macaroons of existence? It is a good thing to have money, isn't it? It not only buys us friends, but it buys us what is of infinitely more value—all the pleasant little *agréments* of life. I would not keep in the world at all if I did not lie on rose-leaves!"

Wherewith the Colonel nestled himself more comfortably into his arm-chair, laid his head on the cushions, closed his eyes, and smoked away at his perfumed hookah, the most fragrant and delicate, that ever came out of Persia.

On the 31st of December, Sabretasche and De Vigne, Curly and I (Curly had got his commission in the Coldstreams, and was the prettiest, daintiest, most flattered, and most flirted with young Guardsman of his time), went down by the express, through the snow-whitened fields and hedges, to Vigne, where, contrary to custom, its master was to take his bride on the first morning of the New

Year. It was to be a very gay wedding. He, always liberal to excess, now perfectly lavish in his gifts, had followed the French fashion, he said, and given her a *corbeille* fit for a princess of Blood Royal, which the Trefusis, having no delicacy of appropriation, accepted as a right. There were to be twelve bridesmaids, not the quite exclusive, and ultra high-bred, young ladies who would have followed Adelina or Blanche Ferrers, but still very stylish-*looking* girls, acquaintances of the Trefusis. There were to be such a breakfast and such rejoicings, as had never before been seen, even at that proverbially magnificent place. Such a wedding was entirely contrary to De Vigne's taste and ideas, but the more others had chosen to run down the Trefusis, the more did he delight to honour her, and therefore he had asked almost everybody he knew, and almost everybody went; for all who knew him wished him well, except his aunt and her daughters the Ladies Ferrers. *They* went because, else, the world might have said that they were disappointed he had not married Blanche; but very far from wishing him well, I think they fervently hoped he might repent his hasty step, in sackcloth and ashes, and their costly wedding presents were much like Judas's kisses. Wedding presents singularly often are! As she writes the delicately mauve-tinted congratulatory note wishing dearest Adeliza every joy that earth can give, and assuring her she is that very beau ideal of a perfect wife, is not Madame ten to one saying to her elder daughter, "How strange it is that Fitz should have been taken in—such a bold, flirty girl, and nothing pretty in her to my taste?" And as we shake Fitz's hand at our Club, telling him he is the luckiest dog going to have such a pretty girl, and such a lot of money by one *coup*, are we not fifty to one thinking, "Poor wretch! he's glad of the tin, I suppose, to keep him out of the Queen's Bench? But, by George; though I *am* hard up, I wouldn't take one of those confounded Peyton women if I knew it! Won't she just check him nicely, with her cheque-book and her consols?"

One could hardly wonder that if the Trefusis had been proved a perfect Messalina or Frédégonde, no man in love with her would have given her up as she sat that last evening of the Old Year on one of the low couches beside the drawing-room fire at Vigne, looking with the ruddy glow

of the fire-gleams upon her like one of Rubens', or Guido's, dark, glowing, voluptuous goddesses or sibyls. De Vigne was leaning over her with eyes for none but her. His mother sat opposite them both, delicate, graceful, fragile, with her diaphanous hands, and fair pure profile, and rich, soft, black lace falling in folds around her, her eyes yearningly fixed upon her son; while just behind her, playing écarté with Curly, who was devotedly fond of that little dangerous French game, was old Lady Fantyre, with her keen, wicked eye, and her rouged, withered cheek, and her fan and feathers, flowers and jewels, and her dress—*décolletée* at seventy-six!

"Look at De Vigne!" said Sabretasche to me. "His desires on the eve of fulfilment, he imagines his happiness will be also. How he bends over that chair, and looks down into her eyes, as if all his heaven hung there! Twelve months hence he will wish to God he had never looked upon her face."

"Good Heavens, Colonel!" I cried involuntarily, "what evil, or horror, do you know of her?"

"None of her personally," said Sabretasche, with a surprised smile. "But is she not a woman; and is not De Vigne, poor fellow, marrying too early? With such premise my prophecy requires no diviner's art to make it a very safe one. As great a contrast as that rouged, atrociously-dressed, abominable old orange-woman is to his own charming and graceful mother, will be De Vigne's real future to his imaginary one. However, he is probably in Socrates' predicament, whether he take a wife or not, either way he will repent; and he must be satisfied; he will have the handsomest woman in England! Few men have as much as that!"

"Ladies ought to hate you, sir," said I, "instead of loving you as idolatrously as they do; for you certainly are their bitterest enemy."

"Not I," laughed Sabretasche. "I am very fond of them, except when they try and hook my favourite friends, and then I would say to them, as Thales said to his mother, that in their youth men are too young to be fettered, and after their youth they are too old. I am sorry for De Vigne—very sorry; he is doing what in a little time, and for all his life through, he will long to undo. But he must

have his own way; and perhaps, after all, as Emerson says, marriage may be an open question, as it is alleged from the beginning of the world, that such as are in the institution want to get out, and such as are out want to get in! Marriage is like a mirage: all the beauty it possesses lies in keeping at a distance from it."

He moved away with that light laugh which always perplexed you as to whether he meant what he said in mockery or earnest, and began to arrange the pieces for a game at chess with one of the ladies. He was very right. His wife would be the woman of all others, from whom, in maturer years, De Vigne would be most certain to revolt. A man's later loves, are sure to be widely distinct in style from his earlier. In his youth, he only asks for what charms his eyes and senses; in manhood—if he be a man of intellect at all—he will go further, and require interest for his mind, and response for his heart.

The last hour of the Old Year chimed at once from the bell-tower of Vigne, the belfry of the old village-church, and the countless clocks throughout the house; as a little gold Bayadère on the mantel-piece struck the twelve strokes slowly and musically on the tambourine. Lady Flora, in her own boudoir, heard it with passionate tears, and on her knees, prayed for her son's new future which this New Year heralded. De Vigne, alone in the library with his betrothed, heard it, and pressed his lips to hers, with words of rapturous delight, to welcome this New Year coming to them both. Sabretasche heard it as he leant over the chair of a lovely married woman, flirting *à outrance*, and bent backward to me as I passed him: "There goes the death-knell! The last day of freedom is over. Go and put on sackcloth and ashes, Arthur."

The Colonel's words weighed curiously upon me as I rose and dressed on the morning of New Year's-day. I, a young fellow, who looked on life and all its chances as gaily as on a game at cricket, who should have come to this wedding as I had gone to a dozen others, only to enjoy myself, drink the Aï and Sillery, and flirt with all the bridesmaids, dressed with almost as dead a chill upon me, I could not have told why, as if I had come to De Vigne's funeral rather than to his marriage. There seemed little reason for regret, however, as I met him that morning coming out of

his room, and held out his hand with his sunny smile. I wished him joy in very few words—I wished it him *too* well to be able to get up an eloquent or studied speech.

"Thank you, dear Arthur," he answered, turning his door-handle with a joyous, light-hearted laugh; "I am sure all the fairies would come and bless my marriage if you'd anything to do with the ordering of them. Come in, old fellow, and have a cigar—my last bachelor smoke—it will keep me quiet till she is out of her maid's hands. Faugh! how I hate the folly of wedding ceremonial! The idea of dressing up Love in white favours, and giving him bride-cake!"

He smoked because, my dear young ladies, men accustomed to the horrid weed, can't do without it, even on their wedding-day; but quiet he was not: he had at all times more of the tornado in him, than anything like the Colonel's equable calm; and he was restless and excitable, and happy as only a man in the same cloudless and eager youth, with the same fearless and vehement passion, can ever be. He soon threw down his cigar, for a servant came to tell him that his mother would like to see him in her own room, and De Vigne, who had been ceaselessly darting glances at the clock, which, I dare say seemed to him to crawl on its way, went out, joyous as Romeo's,

> Come what sorrow may
> It cannot countervail this interchange of joy.

He never thought of Friar Laurence's prophetic reply:

> These violent delights have violent ends:
> And in their triumph die; like fire and powder,
> Which as they kiss consume!

By noon we were all ready.

In the dining-hall, with its bronzes and its deer-heads, and the regimental colours of his father's regiment looped up between the two end windows with his helmet, sabre, and gloves above them, the breakfast, sumptuous enough to have done for St. James's or the Tuileries, was set out, with its gold plate, its hot-house flowers, and its thousand delicacies; and in the private Chapel the wedding party was assembled, with the sun streaming brightly in, through the coloured light of the stained windows. It was a very

brilliant gathering. There were the Marchioness of Malachite and the Ladies Ferrers, looking bored to the last extreme, and appearing to consider it too great an honour for the mosaic pavement to have the glory of bearing their footsteps. There were other dainty ladies of rank, friends of Lady Flora's. There were the dozen bridesmaids in their gauzy dresses and their wreaths of holly or of forget-me-not; there were hosts of men, chiefly military, whose morning mufti threw in just enough shade among the bright dresses, as brilliant by themselves as a bouquet of exotics. There were, strangely enough, close together, bizarre, quick-eyed, queer old Lady Fantyre, and soft, fragile Lady Flora; and, there was De Vigne, standing near his mother, chatting and laughing with Sabretasche, but all his senses alive, to catch the first sound which should tell him of the advent of his bride.

How well I can see him now, as if it were but yesterday, standing on the altar-steps—where his ancestors, through long ages past, had wedded noble gentlewomen and fair patrician girls from the best and bravest Houses in the land—I can see him now, standing erect, his head up, one hand in the breast of his waistcoat, his eyes, dark as night, brilliant and luminous with eagerness; a flush of excitement and anticipation on his face; not a shade, not a fear, seeming to rest upon him! His mother's eyes were riveted on him, with a mournful tenderness, she could not, or did not care to conceal; her lips quivered; she looked at me, and shook her head. That wedding party was very brilliant, but there was a strange, dull gloom over it which everyone felt, yet none could explain; and little of the joyous light-heartedness which make "marriage-bells" proverbial for mirth and gaiety.

There was a very low but an irrepressible murmur of applause, as his bride swept silently up the aisle. Never had we seen her look so handsome. Her voluptuous form was shrouded in the shower of lace that fell around her, and about her, from her head, till it trailed behind her on the ground. The glowing damask-rose hue of her cheeks, not one whit the paler this morning, and the splendid brilliance of her eyes, were enhanced, not hidden, by the filmy floating veil. A wreath of orange-flowers, of course was woven in her hair, and a ceinture of diamonds, worthy

an imperial trousseau—one of the gifts of her lavish and bewitched lover—were jewels fitted to her. She was matchless as a dream of Rubens'; but I looked in vain, as her eyes rested on De Vigne's, for one saving shadow of love, joy, natural emotion, temulous feeling, to denote that he was not utterly thrown away; and only wedded to a priceless statue of responseless marble!

She passed up to the altar with her retinue of bridesmaids, in their snowy dresses and bright wreaths, into the light streaming from the painted windows. She stood beside him; and the service began; one of the Ferrers family, the Bishop of Southdown, read the few words which linked them for life with the iron fetters of the Church. Everyone who caught the glad, firm, eager tone of De Vigne's "*I will*," remembers it to this day—remembers with what trusting love, what unhesitating promptitude he took that vow for "better or worse!" Prophetic words! which say, whatever ill may come of that rash oath sworn, there will be no remedy for it; no help, no repentance that will be of any avail; no furnace strong enough to unsolder the chains they forge for ever!

De Vigne passed the ring over her finger: they knelt down, and the priest stretched his hands over them, and forbade those whom God had joined together any Man to put asunder. And they rose—husband and wife.

They came down the altar steps, his face radiant, in its frank joy, its noble pride, looking down upon her with his brilliant eyes, now soft and gleaming; while she looked straight before her, her lips slightly parted with a smile, probably of triumph and of exultation that an interloper, an adventuress, was now the wife of the last of a haughty House, whose pride throughout lengthened centuries had ever been that all its men were brave and all its women chaste; that not a taint rested on its name, not a stain upon its blood, not a spot upon its shield.

We passed down the chapel into the vestry, he gazing down on her with all the eagerness of passion. But he had no answering glance of love. The day of acting, because the need for acting, was over now. The register was open; he took the quill, and dashed down hastily his old ancestral name; passing it into her hand with fondly whispered words. She took it, threw back her veil, and wrote—

"LUCY TREFUSIS—OR——DAVIS."

De Vigne was bending fondly over her, his lips touching her hair, with its virginal crown, as she wrote. With one great cry he suddenly sprang up, as men will do upon a battle-field when struck with their death-wound. Seizing her hands in his, he held her away from him, reading her face line by line, feature by feature, with the dim horror of a man in some vague dream of hideous agony. And she smiled up in his face; the smile of a fiend.

"Granville de Vigne, do you know me *now?*"

Aye! he knew her now. He still held her at arms' length, staring down upon her, the truth in all its vile horror, its abhorred shame, eating gradually into his very life; seeming as it were to turn his warm blood to ice, and chill his very heart to stone. She laughed—a mocking derisive laugh, which broke strangely, coarsely, brutally, on the dead silence round them.

"Yes! Granville, yes my young lover, I am your Wife, of your own act, your own will. Do you remember the poor mistress you mocked at? Do you remember the summer day when you laughed at my vengeance? Do you remember, *my husband?* Before all your titled crowd, I take my revenge, that it may be the more complete. I would not wait for it, nor spare you one iota of your shame, nor let you keep it secret hidden in your heart! I renounce my own ambitions to humble you lower still. They are hearing us! All your haughty relatives, your fastidious friends, who have tried so long to stop you in your mad passion. They listen to me! They see you dishonoured for ever in your eyes and theirs! They will go and tell the world, what *you* would never have told it, that the last of his Race has given his home, his honour, his mother's place, his father's name—that proud name which only yesterday you told me no disgrace had ever touched, no bad blood ever borne!—to the despised love of his boyhood, his own cast-off low-born toy; a beggar's child; a——"

"PEACE!"

At that single word, hoarse as a death-cry in its unutterable agony, she was silenced perforce. The blood had left his lips, and cheeks, a blue and ghastly hue; and settled on his forehead in a dark and crimson stain—like the stain on

his own honour. His eyes were set and fixed, as in some mortal torture, wide-open and vacant in their pain; his teeth were clenched as men clench them in their last struggle; and his hand was pressed upon his heart, as he gasped for breath, like one suffocated by a deadly grip that throttles him. In the horror of the moment, all round him were dumb and paralysed; even she, in her rancorous hate, paused, awe-stricken at the ruin she had wrought, silent before the anguish, shame, and loathing that convulsed his face, as he flung her from him with a wild shrill laugh.

"Peace! woman—devil! or I shall have your life!" . . .

But his mother threw herself before him. "Oh, God! he is mad! Stay, for *my* sake, stay!"

He strained her to his heart with convulsive force:

"Let me go—let me go!"

None could attempt to arrest him. He pushed his way through the crowd, hurling them aside, like a madman, and we heard the rapid rush of carriage-wheels as they rolled away—none knew where.

## CHAPTER X.

### ON THE FIRST DAY OF A NEW YEAR.

On another New Year's Day, ten years from that fatal marriage, the tropic sun streamed down on parched sand, and tangled jungle, where, in the sultry stillness of the noon, a contest for life and death was raging. Far away on the blue hills slept the golden day; the great palm-leaves drooped languidly; the jaguars, and the tigers, lay couched in the grasses; the florikens, and parrots, closed their soft, brilliant-hued wings to sleep; all nature in the vast solitudes was at peace; even the broad sheet of the river was calm as a tideless lake, pausing in its rapid rush, from its mountain cradle, to its ocean grave. All nature was hushed and still, but the passions of man were warring; when do they ever rest?

It was a skirmish of British cavalry and Beloochee infantry, in a small plain between large woods or hunting grounds, and the red sun shone with an arid glare on the glittering sabres, and white linen helmets of the Europeans.

and the gorgeous turbans, and dark shields of the mountaineers, who were darkening the air with their clashing swords, and breaking the holy hush of wood and hills with long rolling shouts, loud and terrible as thunder.

The mountaineers doubled the English force; they had surprised them, moreover, as, not thinking of attack, they trotted onwards from one garrison to another, and the struggle was sharp and fierce. The English were but a handful of Hussars, under command of their Major, and the odds were great against them. But at their head was one to whom fear was a word in an unknown tongue, in whose blood was fire, and whose heart was bronze.

Sitting down in his saddle as calmly as at a meet, his eyes steady and quick as an eagle's, hewing right and left like a common trooper, the Major fought his way. The Beloochee swords gleamed round him without harm, while crashing through their bright-hued turbans, every stroke of his sabre told. They surged around him, they climbed, they wrestled, they tore, they panted for his blood, they caught his charger's bridle, they opposed before him one dense and bristling forest of swords; still, he bore a charmed life, alike in single combat hand to hand, or in the broken charge of his scattered troop.

In the fierce noontide glow, in the pitiless vertical sunrays, while the wild shouts of the natives rang up to the heavens, and the ceaseless clang and clash of the sabres and shields startled the birds from their rest, and the tigers from their lair, he fought like grim death, as these blows glanced harmless off him, as from Achilles of old; fought till the native warriors, savage heroes though they were, fled from his path, awe-stricken at his fierce valour, at his matchless strength, at his god-like charm from danger. He pursued them at the head of his troop, after the skirmish was over, far away across the plain; then, as he drew bridle and put his reeking sword back into its sheath, another man near him, looked at him in amazement: "On my life, De Vigne, what an odd fellow you are! You look like the very devil in the midst of the fight; and yet when it's over, after sharper work than any even we have seen, deuce take you if you're not as cool as if you'd walked out of a barrack-yard!"

* * * * *

The same 1st of January, while they were enjoying this Cavalry skirmish in the East, we were bored to death by a review at Woolwich. The day was soft and bright, no snow or frost, as Sabretasche, with his Italianised constitution, remarked with a thanksgiving. There was Royalty to inspect us; there were pretty women in their carriages in the inner circle: and there was as superb a luncheon as any military man could ask, in the finest mess-room in England; and we, ungrateful, I suppose, for the goods the gods gave us, swore away at it all, as the greatest curse imaginable. It is a pretty scene enough, I dare say to those who have only to look on; the bright uniforms and the white plumes, the grays and the bays, the chesnuts and the roans, the dashing staff and the cannon's peaceful roar, the marching and the counter-marching, the storming and the sortie, the rush and the charge! I dare say it may be all very amusing to lookers-on, but to us, heated and bothered and tired, obliged to go into harness, which we hated as cordially as we loved it the first day we sported in our Cornethood, it was a nuisance inexpressible, and we should have far preferred fatiguing ourselves for some better purpose under the teak-trees in India.

We were profoundly thankful when it was all over and done with, when H.R.H. F.M. had departed to Windsor without luncheon, and we were free to go up and chat with the women in the inner circle, and take them into the mess-room. There were very few we knew, yet up in town; but Parliament was about to meet, unusually early that year, and there were several from jointure houses, or little villas at Richmond, or Twickenham, or Kew, with whom we were well acquainted.

"There is Lady Molyneux," said Sabretasche, who was now Lieut.-Colonel of Ours. "I dare say that is her daughter with her. I remember she came out last season, and was very much admired, but I missed her by going that Ionian Isle trip with Brabazon. Shall we go and be introduced, Arthur? She does not look bad style, though to be sure these English winter days are as destructive to a woman's beauty, as anything well can be!"

The Colonel wheeled his horse round up to the Molyneux barouche, and I followed him. Ten years had not altered Sabretasche in one iota; he had led the same lounging

and, finally, came before her Majesty in a state of collapse, like a maimed india-rubber ball. Not enjoy things! Why, I enjoy my morning gallop on Bonbon; I enjoy my flowers, my birds, and dogs. I delight in the opera, I adore waltzing, I perfectly idolise music, and the day when a really good book comes out, or a really good painting is exhibited, I am in a seventh heaven. Not enjoy things! Oh, Colonel Sabretasche, when I cease to enjoy life, I hope I shall cease to live."

"You will die very early then!" said Sabretasche, with something of that deepened melancholy which occasionally stole over him, but which he was always careful to conceal in society.

She started and turned her bright eyes upon him surprised and stilled:

"Colonel Sabretasche! Why?

He smiled; his usual gay, courteous smile:

"Because the gods will grudge earth so fair a flower, and men so true a vision, of what angels *ought* to be; but—thanks to preachers, poets, and painters—never *are*."

She shook her head with a pretty impatience:

"Ah! pray do not waste compliments upon me; I detest them."

"Vraiment?" murmured the Colonel, with a little, quiet, incredulous glance.

"Yes, I do indeed. You don't believe me I dare say. Because I have so many of them, Captain Chevasney? Perhaps it is. I have many more than are really complimentary, either to my taste or my intellect."

"Ladies like compliments as children like bonbons," said Sabretasche, in his low, slow voice. "They will take them till they can take no more; but if they see ever so insignificant a one going to another, how they long for it, how they grudge it, how they burn to add it to their store! This is œil de perdrix, will you try it?"

"No thank you," answered the Hon. Violet, with a ringing laugh. The sarcasms on her sex did not seem to touch or disturb her; she rather enjoyed them than otherwise. "What is the news to-day?"

"Nothing remarkable," answered Sabretasche. "Births, marriages, and deaths all put together, to remind men, like Philip of Macedon's valet, that they come into the world,

to suffer in it, and go out again. Much like all other news, Miss Molyneux, except that your name is down as among those arrived in town, and my friend De Vigne is mentioned for the Bath."

"Ah! that Major De Vigne!" cried Violet. "Where is he?—who is he?—what has he really been doing? I heard Lord Hilton talking about him last night, saying that he had been a most wonderful fellow in India, and that the natives called him—what was it?—'the Charmed Life,' I think. Is he your friend?"

"My best," said Sabretasche. "Not Jonathan to my David, you know, nor Iolaüs to my Orestes; we don't do that sort of thing in these days. We like each other, but as for dying for each other, that would be far too much trouble; and, besides, it would be bad ton—too demonstrative. But I like him; he is as true steel as any man I know, and I shall be delighted to have a cigar with him again, providing it is not too strong a one. Dying for one's Patroclus would be preferable to enduring his bad tobacco."

Violet looked at him with her radiant glance:

"Well, Colonel Sabretasche, if your cigar be not kindled warmer than your friendship, it will very soon go out again, that's all!"

"*Soit!* there are plenty more in the case," smiled Sabretasche, "and one Havannah is as good as another, for anything I see. But about De Vigne you have heard quite truly; he has been fighting in Scinde like all the knights of the Round Table merged in one. He is Major of the —th Hussars, and he has done more with his handful than a general of division might have done with a whole squadron. His Colonel was put *hors de combat* with a ball in his hip, and De Vigne, of course, had the command for some time. The natives call him the Charmed Life, because, despite the risks he runs, and the carelessness with which he has exposed his life, he has not had a single scratch; and both the Sepoys he fights with, and the Beloochees he fights against, stand in a sort of awe of him. The —th is ordered home, so we are looking out to see him soon. I shall be heartily glad, poor old fellow!"

"Provided, I suppose, he brings cheroots with him good enough to allow him admittance?" said Violet.

"*Sous entendu*," said the Colonel, "I would infinitely prefer losing a friend to incurring a disagreeable sensation. Would not you?"

"Oh! of course," answered the young lady, with a rapid dash of her mischievous eyes. "Frederick's feelings, when he saw Katte beheaded, must have been trifling child's play, to what the Sybarite suffered from the doubled rose-leaves!"

"Undoubtedly," said Sabretasche, tranquilly. "I am glad you agree with me! If we do not take care and undouble the rose-leaves for ourselves, we may depend on it we shall find no one who will take so much trouble for us. To *Aide-toi et Dieu t'aidera*, they should add *Aide-toi et le monde t'aidera*, for I have always noticed that Providence and the world generally befriend those who can do without their help."

"Perhaps there is a deeper meaning in that," answered Violet, "and more justice than first seems? After all, those who do aid themselves may deserve it the most, and, those whose heads and hands are silent and idle, hardly have a right to have the bonbons of existence picked out and given to them."

"I don't know whether we have a right to them, but we find them pleasant, and that is all I look at; and besides, Miss Molyneux, when you have lived a little longer in the world, you will invariably find that it is to those who have much, that much is given, and *vice versâ*. Establish yourself on a pedestal, the world will worship you, even though the pedestal be of very poor brick and mortar; lie modestly down on a moorland, though it be, like James Fergusson, for genius to study science, why, you may lie there for ever if you wait for anybody to pick you up! The world has a trick of serving, like the Swiss Guard and the secret police, whichever side is uppermost and pays them best. However, thank Heaven I want nothing of it, and it is very civil to me."

"*Because* you want nothing of it?"

"Precisely."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE "CHARMED LIFE" COMES BACK AMONG US.

"THANK God I have found a girl who has some notion of conversation. I believe, with the Persians, that ten measures of talk were sent down from Heaven, and the ladies took nine; but of conversation, argument, repartee—the real use of that most facile, dexterous, sharp-pointed weapon, the tongue—what woman has a notion? They employ a thousand superlatives in describing a dress, they exhaust a million expletives in damning their bosom friend. But as for conversation, they have not a notion of it; if you begin an argument, they either get into a passion or subside into monosyllables! A woman who has good conversation is as rare as one who does not care for scandal. I have met them in Paris salons, and we have found one to-day."

So spoke Sabretasche at mess that night *à propos* of Violet Molyneux, who was under discussion in common with our bisque and our wine.

"Then you allow her your approval, Colonel," said Montressor, of Ours.

"Certainly I do," said Sabretasche. "She is exquisitely pretty, even through my eye-glass; and, what is much better, she can talk as if Nature had given her brains, and reading had cultivated them. I dare say they count on her making a good marriage."

"No doubt they do. Jockey Jack has hardly a rap," replied another man. "They can't keep up their Irish place, so they hang out in town three parts of the year, and take a shooting-box, or visit about for the rest. Confound it, I wouldn't be one of the Upper House, without a good pot of money to keep up my dignity, for anything I could see! Violet came out last season, you know?"

"Yes, I know; I remember hearing she made a great sensation," answered the Colonel. "Ormsby told me she was the best thing of the season—the first, by-the-by, I was ever out of London. Lady Molyneux must try to run down Regalia, or Cavendish Grey, or one of the great

matrimonial *coups*. My lady knows how to manœuvre, too; I wonder she should have a daughter so frank and unaffected."

"They've seen nothing of one another," answered Pigott, who always knew everything about everybody, from the price Lord Goodwood gave for his thorough-bred roan fillies, to the private thoughts that Lady Honoria Bandoline wrote each night in her violet-velvet diary. "My lady's always running out somewhere; if you were to call at eight in the morning you'd find her gone off to early Matins; if you were to call at twelve, she'd be off to the Sanctified and Born-again Clearstarcher's jubilee with Lord Saving-grace; at two, she'd be closeted and lunching with her spiritual master—whoever he chance to be; at three, she'd be having a snug boudoir flirtation; at four, she'd be in the Park, of course, or at a morning concert; at six, she'd be dressing for dinner; at ten, she'd be off to three or four balls and crushes; and so between the two she certainly carries out that delightful work, 'How to Make the Best of Both Worlds,' which my Low Church sister sent me the other day!"

"With the idea that you were doing your very utmost to make the worst of 'em, Charlie?" laughed Sabretasche. "I don't know the volume—Heaven forfend!—but the title sounds to me sneaky, as if it wanted to get the sweets out of both, yet compromise itself with neither. Your sketch of Lady Molyneux is as true to life as one of Leech's; but certainly her child is about as unlike her as could possibly be imagined."

"Oh, by George! yes," assented Montressor, heartily; "Vy hasn't one bit of nonsense about her."

"And she's a divine waltzer—turn her round in a nutshell."

"And can't she ride!"

"And her voice is perfection."

"And—she can talk!" added Sabretasche. "I will call in Lowndes-square to-morrow. So the —th is ordered home? We shall see De Vigne again?"

"Unless he exchange to a regiment still on active service," said Pigott.

"He won't do that," I answered. "I heard from him last Marseilles mail, and he said he intended to return

overland. Poor fellow! what ages it is since we've seen him!"

"It is ten years, isn't it?" said Sabretasche, setting down his champagne-glass with half a sigh. "He has had some sharp work out there. I hope it has done him good. I never wished to see a man look as he looked last time I saw him."

"Where's his rascally wife?" asked Montressor.

"The Trefusis?" said I, impatiently. "*I'll* never give her his name, though the law may. She is at Paris, cut by all his set of course, living with the Fantyre, in a dashing hotel in the Champs Elysées, keeping a green and gold Chasseur six feet high, and giving *soirées* to a certain class of untitled English and titled French, who don't care a fig for her story, and care a good deal for her suppers."

"She calls herself Mrs. De Vigne, I think!"

"She *is* Mrs. De Vigne," said Sabretasche, with that bitter sneer which occasionally passed over his features. "You forget the sanctity, solemnity, and beauty of the marriage tie, my dear Montressor. You know it is too 'holy' to be severed, either by reason, justice, or common sense."

"Holy fiddlesticks, Colonel," retorted Montressor, contemptuously; "the best law for that confounded woman would have been Lynch law; and if I'd had my way, I would have taken her out of church that morning and shot her straight away out of hand."

"Too handsome to be shot, Fred."

"She will not be so handsome in a few years; she will soon grow coarse," said the Colonel, that most fastidious of female critics. "She is the full-blown dashing style to strike youngsters, but there is not a single charm that will *last*."

"Are there in any of them? None last long with you, Colonel, I fancy?"

Sabretasche laughed gaily.

"To be sure not!

> 'Therefore is love said to be a child,
> Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.'

Don't you admit the truth of that?"

Six weeks or so after this, I was dining with Sabretasche at his own house—one of his charming, exclusive little

dinner parties. The other men had just left; and the Colonel and I were sitting before the inner drawing-room fire, with the Cid stretched on the rug between us.

"What a sin it is that such a union should be valid," said Sabretasche, talking of De Vigne. "I think I hear that wretched woman tell me, with her cold, triumphant smile, 'Colonel Sabretasche, my father's name was Trefusis, my mother's name was Davis—one was a gentleman, the other a beggar-girl. I have as much, or as little, right to the one as to the other. Let your friend sue for a divorce, the law will not give it him."

"Too true; the law will not. Our divorce law is——"

"An inefficient, insufficient, cruel farce!" said Sabretasche, more energetically than I had ever heard him say anything in his life. "In an infatuated hour a man saddles himself with a she-devil like the Trefusis—a liar, a drunkard, a mad woman; what redress is there for him? None. All his life through he must drag on the same clog; fettering all his energies, crushing out all his hopes, chaining down his very life, festering at his very heart-strings. There, at his hearth, must sit the embodied curse—there, in his home, it must dwell—there, at his side, it must be, till God release him from it!"

I looked up at him in surprise, it was very unusual to see him so warm about anything. He took up his hookah again; yawned, and pointed to a marble statuette of his own chipping, on which the firelight was gleaming.

"Look at that little Venus Anadyomene, Arthur, with the firelight shining on her; quite Rembrandtesque, isn't it? I'll paint it so to-morrow."

"Do, and give the picture to Violet Molyneux. But if you divorce for insanity, every husband sick of his wife can get a certificate of lunacy against her? If for drunkenness, what woman will be safe from having drams innumerable sworn to her? If for incompatibility of temper, after every little temporary quarrel, scores would fly to the divorce courts, and be heartily sorry for it after? Come, how would you redress it?"

"My dear fellow," said Sabretasche, languidly, "I'm not in parliament. I'm much too idle a man. You talk like a sage. *I* only feel—for poor De Vigne."

"You don't feel more for him than I, Colonel—the

Jezebel of a woman! That such an union should be legal, is a disgrace. At the same time, divorce seems to me, of all the niceties of legislature, the most ticklish and unsatisfactory to adjust. If you were to shut the door on divorce, there is an evil unbearable; if you open it too wide, almost as much harm may accrue!"

"My dear Chevasney, you talk like a paterfamilias, a Solon of seventy, a mortal machine without blood, or bones, or feelings," said Sabretasche, impatiently. "I don't care a straw for theories; I look at facts. Put yourself in the position, Arthur, and then sit in judgment. I take it if every man had to do that, the laws would be at once wiser and more lenient; whereas now, on the contrary, it is your man who has the stolen pieces in his pocket, who cries out the most vehemently for the thief to be hanged, hoping to throw off suspicion! Put yourself in the position! Now you are young and easily swayed, you fall in love—as you phrase it—with some fine figure or pretty face. Down you go headlong, never stopping to consider whether her mind is attuned to yours, her tastes in common with yours, her character such as will go well with yours, in the long intercourse that takes so much to make it harmony, so little to make it discord. You marry her; the honeymoon is barely out, before the bandage is off your eyes. We will suppose you see your wife in her true colours—coarse, perhaps low-bred, with not a fibre of her moral nature that is attuned to yours, not a chord in heart or mind that is in harmony with yours. She revolts all your better tastes, she checks all your warmer feelings, she debases all your higher instincts; union with her, humbles you in your own eyes; contact and association with her, lower your tone of thought, and imperceptibly draw you down to her own level. Your home is one ceaseless scene of pitiful jangle, or of coarser violence. She makes your house a hell, she peoples your hearth with fiends; she and her children—hideous likenesses of herself—bear your own name, and make you loathe it. Perhaps you meet one the utter contrast of her, the fond ideal in your youth of what your wife was to be; one in whom you realise all you might have been, all you might have done! You look on Heaven, and devils hold you back, You thirst for a purer life, and fiends mock at you and will not let you reach it What

escape is there for you? None but the grave! Realise this—*realise* it—and you will feel how, as a prisoner lies dying for the scent of the fresh air, while the free man sits contentedly within, so a man happily married, or not married at all, looks on the question of divorce in a very different light to a man fettered thus, with the torments of both Prometheus and Tantalus, the vulture gnawing at his vitals, the lost joys mocking him out of reach!"

His indolence was gone, his impassiveness changed to vived earnestness; his melancholy eyes darkened and dilated:—I shuddered involuntarily.

"You draw a terrible picture, Colonel, and a true enough one, no doubt, as many men would witness if one could see into their homes and hearts. But what I want to know is, how to redress it? What judge could dive into the hidden mysteries of human life, the unuttered secrets of mutual love or mutual hate? What judge could say where the blame lay; or, seeing only the surface, and hearing only the outside, weigh the just points of fitness or unfitness? Who can decide between man and woman? Who, seeing the little of the inner existence that is ever revealed in a law court, could judge between them? We know how mischievously absurd the divorce mania was in Germany? How Dorothea Veit broke with the best of husbands, on the plea of 'want of sympathy,' and went over to Frederick Schlegel; and how the Sensitive doctrine of which Schleiermacher was inaugurator, made it only necessary to be tied, to feel the want of being 'sympathetically matched,' and being untied again. Men would marry then as carelessly as they flirt now, and would, as soon as a pretty face had grown stale to their eye, find out that she was a vixen, a virago, addicted to gin, or anything that suited their purpose, though she might really have every virtue under heaven. Don't you think that it is impossible, as long as human nature is so changeable, and short-sighted, or marriage numbered among our social institutions at all, to trim between too much liberty in it and too little?"

"Hush, hush, my good Arthur!" cried the Colonel, with a gesture of deprecation; "*pray* keep all that for the benches of St. Stephen's some twenty years hence, it is far too chill, sage, and rational for me to appreciate it. I prefer feeling to reasoning—always have done. Possibly

the evils might accrue that you prophesy; but that does not at all disprove what I say, that the marriage fetters are at times the heaviest handcuffs men can wear; heavier than those which chain the galley-slave to his oar, for *he* has committed crime to justify his punishment, whereas a man tricked into marriage by an artful intrigante, or hurried into it by a mad fancy, has done no harm to any one—except himself! If you have such a taste for reason, listen to what John Milton—that grave, calm Puritan and philosophic Republican, the last man in the universe to let his passions run away with him—says on the score." He stretched out his hand to a stand of books near him, and took out a Tetrachordon, bound, as all his books were, in cream-coloured vellum. "Hear what John Milton says:—'Him I hold more in the way to perfection who foregoes an impious, ungodly, and discordant wedlock, to live according to peace, and love, and God's institution, in a fitter choice; than he who debars himself the happy experience of all godly, which is peaceful conversation in his family, to live a contentious and unchristian life not to be avoided; in temptations not to be lived in; only for the false keeping of a most unreal nullity, a marriage that hath no affinity with God's intentions, a daring phantasm, a mere toy of terror; awing weak senses, to the lamentable superstition of ruining themselves: the remedy whereof God in his law vouchsafes us; which, not to dare use, he warranting, is not our perfection, but is our infirmity, our little faith, our timorous and low conceit of charity; and in them, who force us to it, is their masking pride, and vanity, to seem holier and more circumspect than God.' What do you say now? Can you deny the justice, the wisdom, the wide charity and reason of his arguments? It is true he was unhappy with his wife, but he was a man to speak, not from passion, but from conviction. Milton was made of that stern stuff that would have you cut off your right hand if it offended you. In Rome he would have been a Virginius, a Cincinnatus; in the early Christians' days, he would have died with Stephen, endured with Paul. He is not a man like myself, who do no earthly good that I know of, who am swayed by impulse, imagination, passion—a hundred thousand things, who have never checked a wish or denied a desire. Milton is one of your saints and heroes, yet even

he has the compassionate wisdom to see that divorce would save many a man, whom an unfit union drives headlong to his ruin. He knows that it is cowardice and hypocrisy, and, as he says, a wish to seem holier and more circumspect than God, which makes your precisians forbid what nature and reason alike demand, and to which, if the Church and the Law forbade freedom ever so, men would find some means to pioneer their own way. You may cage an eagle out of the sunlight, but the bird will find some road to life, and light, and liberty; or die beating his wings in hopeless effort.—Look there! Good Heavens!"

I sprang up: he rose very quickly for his usual indolent movements. In the doorway stood De Vigne, and we grasped his hands silently, none of us speaking. The memory of that last scene in the chapel at his fatal Marriage Altar, was strong upon us all.

Then Sabretasche put his hand on his shoulder, pushed him gently into an arm-chair before the fire, and said, softly, as a man speaks to a woman.

"Dear old fellow! there is no need for us to say welcome home?"

De Vigne looked up with something of his old smile, though it faded instantly.

"No need, indeed: and *don't* say it. I know you are both glad to see me, and let us forget that we have ever been separated. Arthur, old boy, if it wouldn't sound an insult, I should tell you you were *grown*; and as for you, Colonel, you are not a whit altered; it is my belief you wouldn't change if you lived as long as Sue's Wandering Jew! They told me at the barracks, Arthur was dining with you, and so I came on straight. My luggage is still in the *Pera*, but I brought up some cheroots. Try them, both of you."

We saw that he wished to sweep away the past, and avoid all allusion to his own fate; and we fell in with his humour. Smoking round the fire, we tried to ignore every painful subject; but as I looked at him, I found it hard not to utter aloud my curse on the woman who had sent him out into exile.

Ten long years had not passed without leaving their stamp upon him. His face had lost the glow, the bright eagerness, the rounded outline of his earlier youth. Pale

he had always been, but now the pallor was that of marble, as if the hot young blood surging through his veins had been suddenly frozen; as when the first breath of winter checks the free, warm, vehement waters in their course, and chills them into ice. It was still the face of a man of wayward will, and strong passions, but of waywardness which had cost him dear, and of passions that were chained down perhaps for ever.

"You have seen good service out there, De Vigne," began Sabretasche, to lighten the gloom which was stealing upon us. "On my word we feel quite proud of you! What a lion you have been, old fellow."

De Vigne smiled.

"I looked a lion because I was among puppy dogs! Yes, I saw a good service, not so much though, as I should have liked. Some of it was pretty sharp work, but we dawdled a whole year away at that miserable Calcutta court; if it had not been for pig-sticking I should never have borne it at all, but I got no end of spears. Then we went up to a hill station, where there was nobody but an old judge, and a missionary or two, who had been bankrupt shoemakers, and taken to dispensing Grace, as a means of getting a few shillings from those discerning Christians who sent them out, firmly crediting their assurances that they felt 'specially called.' There the hill deer, and the ortolans, and a tiger or two kept us going; and then we were ordered off to have a shy at the mountain rebels. They fought magnificently, I must say. Ah! by Jove!" cried De Vigne, his eyes lighting up, "there at last I really *lived*. The constant danger, the ceaseless vigilance, the free life, the sharp service, roused me up, and gave me a zest for existence which I thought I had lost for ever."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" cried the Colonel. "You will have zest enough in it again by-and-by. No man on the sunny side of forty has lost what he may not regain."

"Except where one false step has murdered pride and ruined honour!" said De Vigne between his teeth. "Well, Sabretasche, what have *you* been doing all these years? Flirting, buying pictures and painting them, setting the fashion, and criticizing new singers, as usual, I suppose."

"Don't talk of the years!" cried Sabretasche, lifting his eyebrows. "If I see to-morrow I shall be forty-five. It is

disagreeable to grow old; one begins to doubt one's attractions!"

"You are young enough!—and yet, I don't know; it is a popular fallacy that time counts by years. One is old according to the style of one's life, not the length of it."

"I heard Violet Molyneux tell you last night, Colonel, that you were in the first prime of manhood. So take comfort," said I.

He smiled. "Poor little fool!" he muttered, under his moustaches.

"Violet Molyneux—who is she?" asked De Vigne. "That's a new name to me. Is she a daughter of Jockey Jack, as we used to call him?"

"Yes," I answered; "and a lovely creature. She's a fresh beauty, and a new love for Sabretasche, who worships him most devoutly, especially since she came to his studio this morning and saw his last painting of Esmeralda and Djali.'

"Don't crack me up, Arthur," said Sabretasche, rather impatiently. "Jockey Jack has a daughter who knows how to talk, and sings well enough to please *me* (two especial miracles, as you can fancy, my dear De Vigne); but, certainly both her tongue and her thorax do their business unusually well, and she is very lovely to boot. What have I been doing, did you say? Leading just the same life I have led for the last twenty years. Making love to scores of women, wasting my time over marble and canvas, heading a Hyde Park campaign, or directing a Richmond fête! Caramba! one gets tired of it."

"Why lead it, then?"

"Because none are any better. Do my scientific friends, who absorb their energies in classifying a fossil encrinite; my parliamentary friends, who concentrate their energies in bribing the Unwashed; my philanthropic friends, who hoax the public, and get hoaxed themselves, by every text-quoting thief who has the knack, and the tact, to touch up their weak points; my literary friends, who write to line portmanteaus; my celebrated friends, who toil to get heart-disease, and three damning lines in history—do these, any of them, enjoy themselves one whit the more; or fail to say with Solomon, 'Vanity of vanities—all is vanity?' Tell me so—show me so, and I will begin their

life to-morrow. *Our* vocation is to amuse ourselves, and slay our fellow-creatures by way of intermediate pastime; and it is as good a one, for all I can see, as any other."

"To slay our fellow-creatures!" cried De Vigne. "Come, come, put it little more gracefully. To fight like Britons—to die for our colours. Something a little more poetic and patriotic!"

"Same thing, my dear De Vigne: only the wording different!"

"You like the same life as the Cid, Colonel," said I, smiling. "To eat daintly, sleep warmly, lie on cushions without anybody to trouble you, and kill your game when the spirit moves you."

"And love most truly, and do my duty, as far as I see it, most faithfully? No, no, Arthur, that doesn't do for me at all; it's not in my rôle."

"You'll write on the Cid's grave," said De Vigne, "as Byron wrote on Boatswain's,

> 'In life the firmest friend,
> The first to welcome, foremost to defend.'"

"Yes, indeed; and like him

> 'I never had but one, and here he lies.'

The Cid," said Sabretasche, drawing his dog's ears through his hands—"the Cid is the only thing that cares for me."

"For *you*, the adored of all women, the *cher ami* of all beauties, the 'good fellow' of every man worth knowing in town! What do you mean by only having a dog to care for you? The world would never believe you."

"I mean what I say. *Bon Dieu!* how much does the world know of any of us?"

"Little enough," said De Vigne, "but it is always of those of whom it knows least, that it will affect to know most; and the stranger you sit next at a dinner party is ten to one far better acquainted with your business than you are yourself. We shall hear you are to marry—what is her name?—Voilet Molyneux soon."

"Not I," said Sabretasche; "at least you may *hear* it, but I shall live, and die, as I am now—alone! Who would care for reports? I can as soon imagine a man taking heed of every tuft of dandelion that passes him in the air, or

every insect that crawls beneath his feet, as taking notes of the reports that buzz round his career."

"By Jove, yes!" cried De Vigne. "Out campaigning, one is free from all that trash. Before the cannon's mouth men cannot stop to split straws; and with one's own life on a thread, one cannot stop to ruin another's character. I do not know how it is—I have read pretty widely, but philosopher never preached endurance to me as well as Nature. A few months ago I was camping out to net ortolans. Round us was the dense stretch of the forests and jungles; no wind, no sound, except the cry of the hill deer; nothing stirring, except now and then an antelope flitting like a ghost across the clearing, and, over it all, the southern stars. On my life, as I lay there by our watch-fire alone, with my pipe, it struck me that, if we would let her, Nature would be a truer teacher than creeds or homilies. Human life seems so small beside the vast life of great forests. The calm grand silence rebukes our own feverishness. We who fancy that the eyes of all the universe are on us, that we are the sole love and charge of its Creator, feel what ephemera we are in the giant scale of existence; what countless myriads of such as we have been swept from their place out of sight, and not a law of the spheres around been stirred, not a moment's pause been caused, in the silent march of creation! Under men's tutelage, I grow impatient and irritated. What gage have I that they know better than I? They rouse me into questioning their dogmas, into penetrating their mysteries, into searching out, and proving, the nullity of the truths they assume for granted; but under the teaching of Nature I am silent. I recognise my own inferiority. I grow ashamed of my own pride."

"Aye!" answered Sabretasche. "A wayside flower, a sunny savannah, even a little bit of lichen on a stone in the Campagna, has taught one truer lesson than are taught in the forum or the pulpit. Man sees so little of his fellow-man; he is so ready to condemn, so slow to sympathise with him, that, if he attempt to teach, he is far more apt to irritate than aid: but, to the voices of Nature, the bluntest sense can hardly fail to listen, and they speak in a tongue translatable alike to the Indian in his woods and the savant in his study."

"But one is apt to lose sight of Nature in the hurry

and conflict of actual every-day social life! Standing alone among the Alps, a man learns his own insignificance; but once back in the world, the first line of a favourable review, the first hurrah of an admiring constituency, the first applause that feeds his ear in the world he lives in, will give him back his self-appreciation, and he will find it hard not to fancy himself of the importance to the universe that he is to his clique. That is partly why I was unwilling to leave campaigning. There the jungle and the stars took me in hand, and there, by my camp fire, I would listen to them, though God knows whether I be the better for it. Here, on the contrary, men will be prating at me, and I shall chafe at them, and it will be a wonder if I do not kick out at some of them. My guerilla life suits me better than my fashionable one."

"You are too good for it all the same," said Sabretasche; "and if you should put the kicking process into execution, it will be a little wholesome chastisement for them, and a little sanitary exertion for you! Jungles and planets are grander and truer, *sans doute*, but Johannisberger and Society are equally good for men in their way, and, besides —they are very pleasant!"

"Your acme of praise, Sabretasche," laughed De Vigne. "I agree with you that human nature is, after all, the best book we can learn, only the study is irritating, and one sees so much *en noir* there, that if we look too long we are apt to fling away our lexicon, with a curse."

"The best way, after all," said the Colonel, with a cross between a yawn and sigh, "is to take nothing seriously! Men and women are marionettes; learn the tricks of their wires and strings, and make them perform, at your will, tragedy, comedy, farce, whatever pleases your mood. Human life is a kaleidoscope, with which the wise man amuses himself; it has pretty pictures for the eye, if you know how to shake them up, and as for analysing it, pulling it to pieces, for being only bits of cork and burnt glass, and quarrelling with it for being trumpery instead of *bonâfide* brilliants—*cui bono?*—you won't make it any better."

"Possibly; but I shall not be taken in by it."

"My dear fellow, I think the time when we *are* taken in by it is the happiest part of our lives."

"Maybe. His drum is no pleasure to a boy after he has

broken it, and found the music is empty wind, with no mystery about it whatever! I say, what is your clock? Am I not keeping you from some engagement or other?"

"None at all," answered Sabretasche, "and you will just sit where you are for the next four hours. Give me another cheroot, and take some more brandy. Is it likely we shall let you off early?"

We did not let him off early; and all the small hours had chimed before we had done talking, with the fire burning brightly, and the Cid lying full length between us, with his muzzle between his fore-pads, while De Vigne told us tales of his Indian campaign that roused even listless Sabretasche, and fired my blood like the war-note of the Long Roll, or the trumpet call of Boot and Saddle!

## CHAPTER XII.

### SABRETASCHE, HAVING MOWED DOWN MANY FLOWERS, DETERMINES TO SPARE ONE VIOLET.

FROM the hour he had left her in the vestry at Vigne church, De Vigne had never seen the woman who, by law, stood branded on him as his wife. His passion changed to loathing, and the hate wherewith he hated her was far greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. Could it be otherwise? Could any man feel anything but deadliest hate towards the woman who had outwitted and entrapped him, outraged his honour, shivered his pride to the dust, and shaped her vengeance in a form which must press upon him with a dead and ice-cold weight, strike from his path all the natural joys that bloom so brightly for a man so young; and stretch over his whole existence a shadow all the blacker that its giant upas-tree sprang from the forgotten seed of a boyish sin. He left her in the madness of his agony; and swore never to touch even her hand again. Passion changed to abhorrence, and what had charmed and intoxicated him with the sensual beauties of form, now filled him only with abhorrence and disgust. He saw her bearing his own name, holding his own honour; coarse, cruel, ill-born, ill-bred, the

pollution of her past life vainly covered with the varnish of society; and seeing her thus, knew that till one or other was in the grave this woman was his WIFE. Remorse, too, was added to his curse. His mother had died of that blow which had struck at the root of her son's peace and honour. She had been for some years aware, though she had never allowed De Vigne to be told of the frail tenure on which she held her life, that any sudden emotion or excitement might at any time be her death-blow: a secret she had kept with that silent heroism of which here and there women are found capable. As De Vigne left the chapel, Sabretasche had lifted her up in what he believed to be a fainting fit; it was a swoon, from which she never awoke, and her son was left to bear his curse alone:

I have seen men writhing in their death agony, I have seen women stretched across the lifeless body of their lover on the battle-field; I have seen the torture of human souls cooped up by shoals in hospital sick-wards; I have seen mortal suffering in almost all its phases—and they are varied and pitiful enough,—but I never saw any so silent and yet so awful as De Vigne's, when we hurried after him up to town. When we found him, the Trefusis's revenge had done its work upon him; lengthened years would not have quenched life, and light, and youth, as the remorse, the humiliation, the conflicting passions at war within him, had already done. The tidings we brought crowned the anguish that had entered into his life. Gently as Sabretasche broke it to him, I thought it would have killed him. His lips turned grey as stone, he staggered like a drunken man, and threw up his arms in his blind agony.

"My God! and *I* have murdered her!"—that was all he said. Under what throes his iron pride was bowed in his night watches beside the lifeless form of the mother whose love for him had slain her, no one knew. He was alone in his doom, and I could only guess by my knowledge of him how madly he cursed the passions that had wrought his ruin, how long and silently the vulture of remorse gnawed his heart away, with the haunting memory of his folly and its fruit.

As rapidly as possible he exchanged into the —th Hussars, and sailed for Scinde. He saw none of his old

companions and acquaintance, save the Colonel and myself; he shunned all who had been witnesses of his marriage, all who knew of the stain upon his name. It is easy to bear the contempt and censure of the world when defiance of its laws brings fame and rapture; but its sneer may be hard even to a brave man to bear, when the world has cause to call him Fool, when it can triumph in vaunting its own superior penetration, in recalling its own wise prophecies of his fall, and in compelling him to make the most difficult of all confessions to a proud heart—"*I was wrong!*"

He commissioned Sabretasche to make arrangements with his wife, but all that the Colonel, consummate man of the world though he was, could do, was to exact that she should receive an allowance of two thousand a year, on condition that she never came to England. The Trefusis accepted it, possibly because she knew the law would not give her so much, and went to Paris and the Bads, leading a pleasant life enough I doubt not, but careful to make it far too proper a one—outwardly, at the least—to give him any chance of a divorce. Separated from him at the altar, she was still legally his wife and bore his name. By what miracle of metamorphosis, by what agency, assistance, or self-education, she had been enabled to change and exalt herself, we knew not then, nor till long afterwards. That De Vigne had not recognised her was scarce astonishing. In those long years the unformed girl of seventeen had changed into the mature beauty of five-and-twenty; she had grown taller, her form had developed, fashion, dress, and taste lent her beauty a thousand aids unknown to her in her earlier days. It was not wonderful that, having forgotten Lucy Davis, and almost all connected with her, he should fail to recognise her in so utterly different a sphere, so entirely altered as she was in feature, manner, station, and appearance; though how she had so metamorphosed herself I used to think over many and many a time, never able to find a solution.

At length, after ten years' absence, De Vigne returned home to resume the social life he had so suddenly snapped asunder. To careless eyes he was much the same, but *I* felt that the whole man was changed. Reserved, sceptical of all truth and of all worth, his generous trust changed to chill suspicion, his fiery impetuosity chained down under a

semblance of icy cynicism, his strong passions held down under an iron curb, the treachery of which he had been the victim seemed to have wholly altered his once frank, warm, and cordial nature.

"The fact is," said Curly to me, as we were riding down Piccadilly to the Park, "De Vigne, poor fellow! is as frozen by this miserable *mésalliance* as the ships in the Arctic Seas. It would do him a world of good to fall in love again, but he won't. Ah, by Jove, here he is! Beautiful creature, that mare, of his is—three parts thoroughbred; and just look at her wild eye. How are you? My dear fellow, I'm deucedly glad you're come back!"

"Very kind of you, Curly," laughed De Vigne, "but I'm not sure I re-echo you. A gallop in the cool night through the jungle is preferable to passing up and down the Ride yonder."

"Wait till the Ride is full," replied Curly, "with all the gouty wits, and the dandy politicians, and the amazoned belles, and the intensely got-up stock-brokers, and the immensely showy livery-stable hacks, who would go so delightfully if they weren't broken-winded, or knocked-kneed! Wait till the season, my good fellow—till you drink Seltzer as thirstily as a tired hound drinks water, till you spend the summer nights crushed up on the staircases, till you waste a couple of hundreds giving a dinner to men and women who, having eaten your *croustades*, drive away to demolish your character,—wait till the season, and *then* you'll admit the superiority of enjoyment to be found in Town! There's nobody in it yet, except, indeed, Violet Molyneux."

"Whom I have not seen," said De Vigne; "but I will call, for I used to know her mother very well, an eminently religious flirt! I have a curiosity to see this young beauty, because she has Sabretasche's good word."

"A good word, by-the-by, that's apt to do them as much damage in one way as his condemnation does in another. She little knows what a desperate Lothario he is. I wonder if he'll ever marry?"

"I wonder if you'll ever hang yourself, Curly?" said De Vigne, dryly. "I say, shall we go and call on the Molyneux now? May as well."

"Do!" responded Curly.

Lady Molyneux was at home, a rare thing for that rest-

less mosaic of religion and fashion, of decided "*ton*" and pronounced "piety;" and we found her chatting with one of her beloved spiritual brothers, the Bishop of Campanile, a most pleasant *bon viveur*, by no means a Saint Anthony on the score of earthly temptations, while in a low chair sat Violet Molyneux talking to Sabretasche, who was listening to her with an air of half-indolent amusement, and magnetising her with the soft lustrous gaze of his mournful eyes, that had wound their way into so many women's love.

Lady Molyneux welcomed us all charmingly; while there was a shadow of impatience in her daughter's tell-tale eyes at having her talk interrupted: but the Colonel, who had a knack of monopolising a woman quietly, did not give up his seat, and soon resumed his discussion with her, which it seemed was on the poets of the present day.

"What do you think of the 'Idyls of the Lotus and the Lily?" asked Violet of De Vigne, referring to the book they were discussing, the last mystical nonsense that had issued from the imagination of the pet rhymer of the day.

"I cannot say I think much," smiled De Vigne. "To read that man's works one wants a dictionary of all his unintelligible jargon, his 'double-barrelled adjectives,' his purposely-obscured meanings!"

"All that is treason here, De Vigne," said Sabretasche, with a smile. "Miss Molyneux is the patron and champion of everything visionary, high wrought, and unintelligible to ordinary mortals. These raving individuals, 'sad only for wantonness,' strangely please dreamy young ladies and gentlemen ignorant of the true meaning, sorrows, and burdens of this 'work-a-day world.'"

Violet made him a graceful *révérence*.

"Is that a hit at me? But you forget, that feeling—romance, as you are pleased to call it—has been the germ and nurse of all great writers. The swan must suffer before it sings. Did not his child-love inspire Dante? Would Petrarch have been all he is but for the '*amore veementissimo ma unico ed onesto?*' Did not his passion for Mary Chaworth have its influence for life upon the writings of Byron? And was not Leonora d'Este to Tasso what Diana's kiss was to Endymion?"

"And was not the domestic misery of Milton's married life the inspiration of that tirade upon women in Adam's speech?" asked Sabretasche quietly; "and but for Anne Hathaway, might we have ever had that oration of Posthumus:

'Even to vice
They are not constant; but are changing still
One vice, but of a minute old, for one
Not half so old as that!'"

"Some better woman taught him, then," cried Violet "that from women's eyes

'Sparkles still the right Promethean fire,
They are the books, the arts, the academes
That show, contain, and nourish all the world!'"

Sabretasche bowed his head in acknowledgment of defeat.

"You have conquered me, as Rosaline conquered Biron!"

He said the words as he had said such things to scores of other women as lovely as Violet Molyneux; from anybody else she would have taken them at their value; at the Colonel's glance her colour deepened.

"But don't you think, Miss Molyneux," suggested De Vigne, "that when Tasso languished in Ferrara dungeons, he must have wished he had never seen the Este family! Don't you fancy that Gemma Donati must have rather cancelled Dante's good opinion of the *beau sexe*, and that his 'wife of savage temper' may have been a bitter tonic rather than sweet balm to his genius? And as for Byron—well! Miss Milbanke was rather a thorn in his side, wasn't she? And with all the romance in the world, I think, when he called on Mrs. Musters, he must have thought he had been rather a fool. What do you say?"

"I say that you have not a trace, not a particle, not an infinitesimal germ of romance!"

"Thank Heaven—no!" said De Vigne, with a laugh.

I doubt, though, if the laugh was heartfelt. I dare say he thought of the time when romance was hot and strong in him, and trust and faith strong too!

"I pity you, then! Where I think you sceptical men err so much," said Violet, turning her brilliant eyes on

Sabretasche, "is in confounding false and true, good and bad, feeling with sentiment, genius with pretension. Why at one sweep condemn the expression of unusual feeling as sentiment, simply because it *is* unusual? Deep feeling is rare; but it does not follow that it is unreal. You tread on a thousand ordinary flowers—daisies, buttercups, cowslips, anemones—in an every-day walk; they are all fair, all full of life; but out of all the Flora, there is only one Sensitive Plant that shrinks and trembles at your touch. Yet, though the Sensitive Plant is organised so far more tenderly, it is no artificial offspring of mechanism, but as fresh and real, and living a thing as any of the others!"

De Vigne and Curly were now chatting with Lady Molyneux, whose bishop had taken his *congé*. Sabretasche still sat by Violet a little apart.

"I believe you," he said, gently; "there *are* sensitive plants, so fresh and fair, that it is a sin they should ever have to shiver in rude hands, and learn to bend with the world's breath. But live as long as we have, and you will know that the deep feeling of which you are thinking is never found in unison with the poetic and drivelling sentiment we ridicule. Boys' sorrows vent themselves in words—men's griefs are voiceless. If ever you feel—pray God you never may—vital suffering, you will find that it will never seek solace in confidences, never *lament itself*, but rather hug its torture closer, as the Spartan child hugged the fierce wolf-fangs. You will find the difference between the fictitious sorrows which run abroad proclaiming their own wrongs; and the grief which lies next the heart night and day, and, like the iron cross of the Romish priest, eats it slowly, but none the less surely, away."

They were strange words to come from Vivian Sabretasche! Violet looked at him in surprise, and her laughing eyes grew sad and dimmed. He had forgotten for the moment where he was; at her earnest gaze he roused himself with the faintest tinge of colour on his face.

"I am going to ask you to do me a most intense kindness; would you mind singing me Hullah's 'Three Fishers?' I declare to you it has haunted me ever since I heard you sing it on Tuesday night; and it is so seldom I hear any music that is not a screech—rarely, indeed, anything that *satisfies* me as your songs do."

"Oh yes, if you will sing *me* those Italian songs of yours. Major De Vigne, if you have no romance, I am quite sure you cannot care for music, so I give you full leave to talk to mamma as loudly as ever you like, I am going to sing only to Colonel Sabretasche."

Sabretasche looked half-pleased, half-amused at the distinction accorded to him, and followed her to the back drawing-room, where he leaned on the piano looking down upon her, while Violet sang with one of the best gifts of nature a clear, bell-like, melodious voice, highly tutored, and as flexible and free as the song of a mavis in spring-time. I am not sure whether her mother was best pleased or not at that musical *tête-à-tête*, for Sabretasche had an universal reputation as a most unscrupulous libertine, and Lady Molyneux knew his character too well to think he was likely to be doing any more than playing with Violet, as the most attractive beauty in town. But then, again, his word was almost law in all matters of taste. He could injure Violet irretrievably by a depreciating criticism, and could make her of tenfold more marketable value by an approving word, for there were numbers of men who moulded themselves by his dictum. So Lady Molyneux let them alone.

I don't suppose, however, that she noticed Violet drawing out a large bunch of her floral namesakes from a Bohemian glass, and lifting them up for Sabretasche to scent.

"Are they not delicious? They remind me of dear old Corallyne, when I used to gather them out of the fresh damp moss. Do you know Kerry, Colonel Sabretasche? No? Oh, you should go there; it is so beautiful, with its blue lakes, and its wild mountains, and its green, fragrant woodlands."

"I should like it, I dare say," said Sabretasche, smiling, "with you for my guide. I want some added charm now to give 'greenness to the grass and glory to the flower.' Once I enjoyed them for themselves as you do; but as one gets on in life there is too silent a rebuke in nature for us to enjoy it unrestrainedly. Is Lord Molyneux's estate in Kerry?"

"Don't call it an estate," laughed Violet; "it always amuses me so when I see it put down in the peerage. It is only miles and miles of moorland, with nothing growing

on it but tangled wood and glorious wild-flowers. There are one or two cabins with inhabitants like kelpies. The house has been, perhaps, very grand when all we Irish were kings, and you Sassenachs, Roman slaves; but at the present moment, having lost three-quarters of its roof and nine-tenths of its timbers, having rats, and owls, and ghosts innumerable, no windows, and no furniture, you would probably think it more picturesque than comfortable, and feel more inclined to paint it than to live in it."

"But *you* live in it?"

"Ah! when I was a child; but it was a little better then. There was a comfortable room or two in it, and I was very happy there with my favourite governess and my little rough pony, when papa and mamma were up here or in Paris, and left us to ourselves in Corallyne. I wonder if I shall ever be as happy as I was there?"

"You are very happy here?" said Sabretasche, with a sort of pity for the joyous heart to which sorrow was yet but a name.

"Happy? Oh, yes; I enjoy myself, and I am always light-hearted; but I have things to annoy me here; the artifices and frivolities of society worry me. I want to say always what I think, and nobody seems to do it in the world."

"The world would be in hot water if they did. But pray speak it to me."

"I always do! Yes, I enjoy London life. I like the whirl, the excitement, the intellectual discussion, the vivid, *real* life men lead here. I should enjoy it entirely if I did not see too many hard, cruel, worn faces under the fair smiling masks."

"*Pauvre enfant!*" murmured Sabretasche. "Do you suppose there are any light hearts under the dominoes?"

"*Yours* is not a light one?"

"Mine!" echoed the Colonel, with a strange intonation; then he laughed his gay soft laugh. "If it be not, mademoiselle, you are the first who has had penetration enough to find it out. I am *quêteur* of amusement in general to all my friends! There is De Vigne going, and so must I. I shall not thank you for your songs."

"No!" she said, laughingly. "You would not have asked me to sing if you had not wished to hear me, for I know that on principle you never bore yourself"

"Never. No one is worth such a self-sacrifice."

"Not even I?"

"To suppose such a case, I must first imagine you boring me, which just at present is an hypothesis *not* to be imagined by any stretch of poetic fancy," laughed Sabretasche, as he held out his hand to bid her good morning.

She held the violets up to him.

"You have forgotten the flowers?"

"May I have them?"

He slipped them hastily into the breast of his waistcoat, and came forward to Lady Molyneux.

"Violet, my love," began her mother, as the door closed on us, "Colonel Sabretasche comes here a great deal; I wish you would not be quite so—quite so—expansive with him."

"Expansive! What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, my dear Violet," repeated the Viscountess, the milk of roses turning a little sour. "You treat him quite as familiarly as if he were your father or your lover. You need not colour, I don't say he *is* the last; God forbid he should be, with his principles. I know he makes himself agreeable to you, but so, as every one will tell you, he has done for the last twenty years to any pretty woman that came across his path; and your speech to his friend De Vigne, about 'singing *only* to Colonel Sabretasche,' was not alone unmaidenly, it was absurd."

"How so? I only cared for him to hear it and like it."

"It was all very well for him to hear it and like it," replied my lady, irritably—prominent piety has a queer knack of souring the temper—"his extreme fastidiousness makes his good word well worth having; the best way to make your opinion of value in society is to admire nothing, as he does! But, at the same time, it is a dear way of gaining his applause to keep all other men in the background while you are flirting with him. Before you saw him you liked Regalia, and Killury, and plenty of others, well enough; now you really attend to no one else."

"All they can do is to ride, and waltz, and smoke; he has the genius of an artist. They think they please me by vapid flattery; he knows better. They are one's subjects, he is one's master!"

Lady Molyneux was seriously appalled by such an outburst. She raised her eyebrows sarcastically:

"You admire Vivian Sabretasche very much, Violet? I should not advise you to say so, my dear."

"Why not? it is the truth."

"Few truths can be spoken," replied the eminently religious, fashionable lady, coldly. "Why you had better not proclaim your very Quixotic admiration for Sabretasche, because he bears as bad a character for morality as he bears a good one for talent and fashion. What his life has been every one knows; he is a most unprincipled libertine. No one ever dreams of expecting anything serious of him; he is the last man in the universe to marry, but a flirtation with him may very greatly injure your prospects—"

"Oh, pray don't! I am so sick of those words; they are so lowering, so pitiful, so conventional, making a market of oneself! I cannot bear to hear you speak so. As to his life, he has led the same life as most men, probably; but you need only look in his eyes to see whether anything base or cruel can attach itself to him."

Her mother sighed, and sneered, and smiled unpleasantly.

"My love, the way you talk is too absurd. You forget yourself strangely. How is it possible for you to judge of the character of a man nearly fifty, a *blasé* man of the world, who was one of the greatest *roués* about town while you were a little child in the nursery; it is too ridiculous! But go and dress for dinner. The dear bishop, and Cavendish Grey, and Killury will dine here."

"Poor sensitive plant, it would be a pity my hands should touch it and wither its freshness and fairness," thought the Colonel, as he turned his tilbury from the door. "Vivian Sabretasche, I say, are you growing a fool? Don't you know that the golden gates won't open for you? You barred them yourself; you have no right to complain. Have you not been going to the bad all the days of your life? Have you not persuaded the world, ever since you lived in it, that you are a reckless, devil-may-care Don Juan, a smasher of the entire Decalogue? Why should you now, just because you have looked into that girl's bright eyes, be trying to trick yourself and her into the idea that you possess such affairs as heart, and feeling, and regrets, because she, fresh to life, is innocent enough to have a taste for such nonsense?

All folly—folly! Back to your animate friends, horses and men, and your inanimate loves, chisel and palette, or you may grow a fool in your older years, as many wise men have done before. You've pulled up many fair flowers in your day, you can surely leave that one Violet in peace."

"Open the door, Colonel Sabretasche, and let me out. It is of no use telling me not—I will!"

With which enunciation of her own self-will the Hon. Violet Molyneux sprang to the ground in St. James's-street, just opposite *the* bay-window, to the unspeakable horror of her mother, and the excessive amusement of De Vigne and Sabretasche, who were driving in the Molyneux barouche. One of the podwered, white-wanded, six-feet-high plushes that swayed to and fro at the back of the carriage, having dismounted at some order of his mistress's had happened to push, as those noble and stately creatures are given to pushing every plebeian peripatetic, against a young girl passing on the pavement. The girl had with her a portfolio of pictures, which the abrupt rencontre sent out of her grasp, scattering its contents to the four winds of heaven, and to apologise was the work of a second with that perfectly courteous, but according to her mamma and her female friends, much too impulsive and unconventional young beauty, the Hon. Violet, whose fatal lessons, learnt on the wild moorlands and among the fragrant woods of her beloved Corallyne, and the aristocratic experiences of her single season had been sadly unable to unteach her.

"Ashton, how can you be so careless? Pick those drawings up immediately and very carefully," said the young beauty, as, turning to the young girl, she apologised with polished courtesy for the accident her servant had caused, while the man, in disgusting violence to his own feelings, was compelled to bend his stately form, and even to so far fall from his pedestal of powdered propriety and flunkeyism grandeur, as to run—yes, absolutely run—after one of the sketches, which, wafted by a little breeze that must have been that mischievous imp Puck himself, ambled gently and tantalisingly down the street. The young girl thanked her with as bright a smile as Violet's, and votes were divided in the club windows as to which of the two was the most charming, though the one was a fashionable belle, with

every adjunct of taste and dress, and the other an unprotected little thing walking with a woman servant in St. James's-street; and artist probably, or a governess. She took her portfolio (by this time men in the clubs were all looking on, heartily amused, and Sabretasche and De Vigne were picking up the pictures, on the back of which they had time to observe the initials "A. T., St. Crucis-on-the-hill, Richmond Park," with much more diligence than the grandiose flunkey;) thanked Violet with a low graceful bow, and was passing on, when she looked up at De Vigne. Her lips parted, her eyes darkened, her face brightened; she stood still a minute, then she came back: "Sir Folko!" But he neither saw nor heard her, his foot was on the step of the barouche; the footman shut the door with a clang, swung himself up on the footboard, and the carriage rolled away into Piccadilly.

"Violet, Violet! how you forgot yourself, my love?" whispered Lady Molyneux, scandalised and horror-stricken. "I wish you would not be quite so impulsive. All the gentlemen in White's were staring at you."

"Let them stare, dear," laughed Violet, merrily. "It is a very innocent amusement, it gives them a great deal of pleasure and does me no harm. What glorious blue eyes that girl had. You should laud me for my magnanimity in praising another woman so pretty."

"For magnanimity in that line is not a virtue of your ex," said De Vigne.

"You cynic! I don't see why it should not be."

"Don't you? Did you, on your honour, then, fair lady, ever speak well of a rival?"

"I never had one."

"You never could," whispered Sabretasche, bending forward to tuck the tiger-skin over her.

"But supposing you had?" persisted De Vigne.

"I hope I should be above maligning her; but I am afraid to think how I should hate her."

Violet's eyes met the Colonel's; her colour rose, and he incongruously enough turned his head away.

"If Miss Molyneux treats the visionary things of life so earnestly, what will she do when she comes to the realities?" laughed De Vigne.

Lady Molyneux sighed; on occasions she would play at tender maternity, but it did not sit well upon her

"Ah! if we did not find some armour besides our own strength in our life pilgrimage, few of us women would be able to endure to the end of the Via Dolorosa."

"True! Britomart soon finds a buckler studded with the diamonds of a good dower, or stiffened with the parchment-skins of handsome settlements; and, tender and gentle as she looks, manages to go through the skirmish very unscathed by dint of the vizor she keeps down so wisely, and the sharp lance of the tongue she keeps always in rest against friend and foe!"

"What thrusts of the spear you deserve; you are worse than your friend, and he is bad enough!" cried Violet, looking rather lovingly, however, on the Colonel, despite his errors. "I am sure if women take to lance and vizor, it is only in self-defence, for you would pierce us with your arrows if you could find a hole in our armour."

"But here and there is a woman who unhorses us at once, and on whom it is a shame to draw our swords. Agnes Hotots are very rare, but when we do find them, Ringsdale is safe to go down before them," said Sabretasche, with his eloquent glance.

"I should think you have both of you been conquered or imprisoned some time or other by some Cynisca, or Maria de Jesu, whom you cannot forgive, and who makes you so bitter upon us all!" laughed Violet.

She said it in the gay innocence of her heart! Both were silent: and Violet instinctively felt that she had trodden on dangerous ground—then De Vigne laughed though a curse would have been better in unison with his thoughts.

"Miss Molyneux, with all due deference to your sex, there are few men, I fear, who, if they told you the truth, would not have to confess having found, that those warm and charming feelings with which you young ladies start fresh in life, have a knack of disappearing in the atmosphere of society, as gold disappears melted and swallowed up in aqua regia."

"Will you let your pure gold be lost in this metaphorical aqua regia?" whispered the Colonel, half smiling, half sadly, as he handed her out, at her own house.

"Oh! never!"

"You mean it now, but—Well, we shall see!" And

Sabretasche led her up the steps with his low, careless laugh. "When you are Madame la Princess d'Hautecour, or her Grace of Regalia, perhaps you will not smile so kindly on your old friends!"

She turned pale; her large eyes filled with unshed tears She thought of the violets she had given him a few days before.

"You are unkind and unjust, Colonel Sabretasche," she said haughtily. "I thought you more kind, more true—"

"I am neither," said Sabretasche, abruptly for that ultra suave and tender squire of dames. "Ask your mamma for my character, and believe what she will tell you. I would rather you erred in thinking too ill—though that people would say is impossible—than too well of me."

"I could never think ill of you—"

"You would be wrong, then," said Sabretasche, gravely. Just then her mother and De Vigne entered and the Colonel, with his light laugh, turned round to them with some jest. Violet could not rally quite so quickly.

That night, at a loo party at Sabretasche's house, De Vigne and I told the other fellows of Violet's impulsive action in St. James's-street; while the Colonel went on with his game in silence.

"She's a great deal too impulsive; it's horrid bad ton," yawned little Lord Killtime, an utterly *blasé* gentleman of nineteen.

"I like it," said Curly. "It's a wonderful treat now-a-days to see a girl natural."

"She is very lovely, there is no doubt about that," said De Vigne. "I dare say they mean to set her up high in the market. Her mother is trying hard for Regalia."

"He's a lost man, then," said Wyndham, who had cut the Lower House and Red Tape for the lighter loves of Pam and Miss. "I never knew the Molyneux, senior, make hard running after any fellow but what she finished him (she's retreated into the bosom of the Church now, and puts up with portly bishops and handsome popular preachers: women often do when they get *passées*; the Church is not so difficile as the laity, I presume!); but ten or less years ago I vow it was dangerous to come within the signal of her fan, she'd such a clever way of setting at you."

"Jockey Jack didn't care," laughed St. Lys, of the Eleventh. "Well, her daughter's no manœuvrer; and, by George, it's worth a guinea a turn to waltz with her."

"She's not bad looking," sneered Vane Castleton, the youngest son of his Grace of Tiara, the worst of all those by no means incorruptible, and very far from stainless pillars of the state, the "Castleton family." "But, by George, I never came across so bold, off-hand, spirited a young filly."

Sabretasche looked up, anger in his languid, tired eyes.

"Permit me to differ from you, Castleton. Your remark, I must say, is as much signalised by knowledge of character as it is by elegance of phraseology! Young fellows like Killtime *may* make such mistakes of judgment; we who know the world should be wiser."

De Vigne, sitting next him, looked up and raised his eyebrows at the Colonel's unusual interference and warmth.

"*Et tu, Brute!*"

Sabretasche understood, and gave him an admonitory kick under the table.

"Who's portrait is that Sabretasche?" asked De Vigne, to stop Vane Castleton's tongue, pointing to a portrait over the mantelpiece in the inner drawing-room, where we were playing; the portrait of a very pretty woman.

"My mother, when she was twenty. Didn't you know it? It was taken just before she married. I believe it was an exact likeness, but I don't remember her."

"It reminds me of somebody—I cannot think of whom. I beg your pardon, I take 'miss.'"

"Why will you talk through the game?" said I. "Don't you think the picture is like that girl who occasioned Violet's championship this morning? That's whom you are thinking of, I dare say."

"Who's talking now, I wonder?" said De Vigne. "Heart's trumps? I did not notice that girl; I was too amused to see Miss Molyneux. No, it is somebody else, but who, I cannot think, for the life of me."

"Nor can I help you," said Sabretasche, "for there is not a creature related to my mother living. But now Arthur mentions it, that little girl was not unlike her; at least, I fancy she had the same coloured hair. *A propos* of likenesses, there will be a very pretty picture of Lady Geraldine

Ormsby in the Exhibition this year. I saw it, half finished, at Maclise's yesterday."

"Why don't you exhibit, Sabretasche?" said Wyndham. "You paint a deuced deal better than ha'f those Fellows and Associates!"

"*Bien obligé!*" cries the Colonel. "I should be particularly sorry to hang up my pets of my easel, to be put level with people's boots, or high above their possible vision, or —if honoured with the 'second row'—be flanked by shocking red-haired pre-Raphaelite angels and staring portraits of gentlemen in militia uniform; and criticised by a crowd of would-be cognoscenti and dilettante cockneys, with a catalogue in their hand and Ruskin rules in their mind, who go into ecstasies over cottage scenes with all Teniers' vulgarities, and none of Teniers' redeeming talent. Exhibit my pictures? The fates forfend! Wyndham, help yourself to that Château Cos, and De Vigne, there is some of our pet Madeira. How sorry I am Madeira now grows graves instead of grapes! Nonsense. Don't any of you think of going yet. Let us sit down again for a few more rounds."

We did, and we played till the raw February dawn was growing gray in the streets, while we laughed and talked over Sabretasche's wine—laughs that might have jarred on Violet's ear, and talk that might have made her young heart heavy, coming from her hero's lips. But when we were gone, and the fire was burning low, the Colonel sat before the dying embers with his dog's head upon his knee, and thought, I believe:

"What a fool I am! Women, wine, cards, art, play—are they all losing their enchantment? Are my rose-leaves beginning to lose their scent, and crumple under me? That girl—child she is to me—has been the only one who has had penetration enough to see that the bal masqué has ceased its charm. She reads me truer than all of them. She will believe no ill of me. She almost makes me wish there were no ill for her to believe! Shall she be the first woman to whom I have shown mercy, the first for whom I have renounced *self?* Cid, old boy! is your master wholly dead to generosity and honour because the world happens to say he is?"

That night De Vigne and I smoked our pipes together

over his fire in the Albany, where he had taken a suite. Vigne had been shut up since his mother's death, and he rarely alluded, even distantly, to the scene of his folly and his wrongs; I do not think he could have endured to revisit, far less to live in it.

"Is Sabretasche really getting touched by that bewitching Irish girl?" said I to him, as we sat smoking.

"God knows! He was rather touchy about her, wasn't he? But that might be only for the pleasure of setting down Castleton, a temptation I don't think I could forego myself. According to his own showing, he's never in love with any woman, but he makes love to almost all he comes across."

"Oh, he's deuced fellow for women!—but he might be really caught at last, you know."

"Certainly," assented De Vigne; "none are so wise that they may not become fools! Socrates, when he was old, sage that he was, did not read in the same book with a woman without falling in love with her."

"You are complimentary to love? Is it invariably a folly?"

"I think so. At least, all *I* wish for is to keep clear of it all the rest of my life."

"Why?"

"Good God! need you ask? From my boyhood I was the fool of my passions. To love a woman was to win her. I stopped for no consideration, no duty, no obstacle; I let nothing come between me and my will. I was as obstinate to those who tried ever to stop me in any pursuit, as I was weak and mad in yielding up my birthright at any price, if I could but buy the mess of porridge on which I had for the time being set my fancy. Scores of times I did that—scores of times some worthless idol became the thing on which I staked my soul. Once I did it too often! It is such eternal misery that that woman, so low-born, so low-bred, shameless, degraded, all that I *know* her to be, should bear my name, should proclaim abroad all the folly into which my reckless passions led me. Thank God I knew it when I did—thank God I left her as I did—thank God that no devil like herself were born to perpetuate my shame, and make me loathe my name because they bore it! *Then* you ask me if I am steeled to love! It has changed my whole nature—

the mis ry of that loathsome connexion! It is not the tie I care for—it is the shame, Arthur—the bitter, burning, shame! It is the odium of knowing that she bears my name, the humiliation that twice in my life have I been fooled by her beauty; it is the agony that my mother, the only pure, the only true friend whom fate ever gave me, was murdered by my reckless passions!"

His hands clenched on the arms of his chair, and the black veins swelled upon his face; it looked as though cast in chill, grey stone. It was my first glimpse of those ghastly dark hours, which exorcised, or invisible, in society and ordinary life, fastened relentlessly upon him in his hours of solitude; of that sleepless and merciless Remorse which dogged his steps by day, and made night horrible.

At that same hour, in a little bed whose curtains and linen were white and pure as lilies, as young girl slept, like a rose-bud lying on new-fallen snow; her golden hair fell over her shoulders, her blue eyes were closed under their black, silky lashes, a bright, happy smile was on her lips, and as she turned in her dreams, she spoke unconsciously in her sleep two words—"Sir Folko!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES IS FOUND IN RICHMOND.

Not content with his house in Park-lane, Sabretasche had lately bought, beside it, a place at Richmond that had belonged to a rich old Indian millionnaire. It had been originally built and laid out by people of good taste, and the merchant had not lived long enough in it to spoil it; he had only christened it the "Dilcoosha," which title, being out of the common, Sabretasche retained. It was very charming, with its gardens, sloping down to the Thames, and was a pet with the Colonel; a sort of Strawberry-hill, save that his taste was much more symmetrical and graceful than Horace's; and he spent plenty of both time and money, touching it up and perfecting it till it was beautiful in its way as Luciennes. De Vigne and I drove down there one morning, towards the end of February, to see the paces tried, on a level bit of grass-land outside the grounds, of a chesnut Sabretasche

had entered for Ascot. Stable slang and the delights of "ossy men" were not refined enough for the Colonel's taste, but he liked to keep a good racing stud; and he wished to have De Vigne's opinion on Coronet, who had run a good second at the "Two Thou;" for De Vigne, who was very well known in the Ring and the Rooms, was one of the surest prophets of success or failure that ever talked over a coming Derby on a Sunday afternoon at Tattersall's.

"What trick do you think my man Harris served me yesterday?" said De Vigne, as we came near Richmond.

"Harris—that good-natured fellow? What has he done?"

"Cut and run with a dozen of my shirts, three morning, two dress-coats; in fact a complete wardrobe; and twenty pounds or so—I really forget how much exactly—that I had left on the dressing-table when I went to mess last night. And that man I took out of actual starvation at Bombay! —had forgiven him fifty peccadilloes, let him off when I found him taking a case of my sherry, because he blubbered and said it was for his mother, found up the poor old woman, who *wasn't* a myth, and wrote to Stevens at Vigne to give her an almshouse; and then this fellow walks off with my goods! And you talk to me of people's gratitude! Bah! How can you have the face, Arthur, to ask me to admire human nature?"

"I don't ask you to admire it—Heaven forefend!—I don't like it well enough myself. What a rascal! 'Pon my life there seems a fate in your seeing the dark side of humanity."

"The *dark* side? Where's any other? I never found any gratitude yet, and I don't expect any. People court you while you're of use to them; when you are not, you may go hang. Indeed, they will help to swing you off the stage, to lessen their own sense of obligation. By Jove! we're half-an-hour too early for the Colonel."

"Too early?" said I. "Then let us go and see that pretty little artist of St. James's-street. I always meant to look her up; and you said she lived somewhere near here."

"I think she did; St. Crucis something or other. What a naughty fellow you are, Arthur," laughed De Vigne. "We'll try and find her out, if you like; though I don't think it's worth while. Hallo! my good man; is there a place called St. Crucis anywhere in Richmond?"

"St. Crucis-on-the-hill be you meaning, sir? a little farm?" said the hedge-cutter he asked, who was sitting in the sun eating his dinner. "Take the road to your left, then the turning to the right, and a mile straight on will see you there." De Vigne tossed him half-a-crown, tooled the greys in the direction told him, and we soon arrived in the quiet lane where the little farm-house stood; turned in at the gate—it was as much as the dashing mail-phaeton could do to pass it—and into a small paved court on one side of which stood the house, long, low, thatched, and picturesque, more like Hampshire than Middlesex; with a garden, and orchard, and a paddock adjoining; all now black and bare in the chill February morning.

"Does a young lady, an artist, reside her?" De Vigne inquired at the door; scarcely had he spoken than the young girl herself, looking temptingly pretty in-doors, came out of an inner room and ran up to him. "Ah! it is you? how glad I am! Do come in, pray do?"

"What a strange little thing!" whispered De Vigne to me, as we followed her through the house to a room at the west end, a long, low chamber with an easel standing in its bay-window, and water-colour etchings, pastels, études, pictures of all kinds, hung about its walls; while some books, and casts, and flowers, gave a refinement to its plain simplicity, often wanting in many a gilt and gorgeous drawing-room which I have entered.

"So you recognised me? How kind of you to come!" said the girl, looking up in De Vigne's face.

De Vigne was wholly surprised; he looked at her for some moments.

"Recognise you? I am ashamed to say I do not."

"Ah! and yet you have called on me. I do not understand!" said the little artist, with a sunny smile, but very marked bewilderment in her eyes and words. "I have never forgotten *you*, Sir Folko. I knew you the other day, when that young lady's servant knocked down my portfolio. Have you quite forgotten little Alma? I am so glad to see you—you cannot think how much!"

And Alma Tressillian held out both her hands to him, with a bright, joyous welcome on her upraised face.

"Little Alma!" repeated De Vigne. "Yes, yes! I remember you now. Where could my mind have gone not to

recognise you at once? You are not the least altered since you were a child. But how can you have come from Lorave to London? Come, tell me everything? My dear child, you are not more pleased to see me than I am to see you!'

Alma was little altered since her childhood: now, as then, her golden hair and eloquent dark-blue eyes, with the constant change, and play, and animation of all her features, made her greatest beauty. They were not regularly beautiful as Violet Molyneux's, their mobility and extreme intellectuality of expression was their chief charm, after all. She was not so tall as Violet, nor had she that exquisite and perfect form which made the belle of the season compared with Pauline Bonaparte; but she had something graceful and fairy-esque about her, and both her face and figure were instinct with a life, an intelligence, a radiance of expression which promised you a rare combination of sweet temper and hot passions, intense susceptibility, and highly-cultivated intellect. You might not have called her pretty: you must have called her much more—irresistibly winning and attractive.

"Come, tell me everything about yourself," repeated De Vigne, as he pushed a low chair for her, and threw himself down on an arm-chair near. "You must remember Captain Chevasney as well as you do me. We shall both of us be anxious to hear all you have to tell; though, I am ashamed to say that in taking the liberty to call on the fair artist whose pictures I picked up, I had no idea I should meet my little friend the Queen of the Fairies!"

"Indeed! Then I wonder you came, though I am very glad to see you! Why should you call on a stranger? Yes, I recollect Captain Chevasney," smiled Alma, with a pretty bend of her head (she did not add "as well"), "I was so sorry when you did not see me that day in Pall Mall; I thought I might never come across you again."

"But where is your grandpapa?—is he in town?"

She looked down and her lips quivered:

"Grandpapa has been dead three years."

"Dead! My dear child, how careless of me! I am grieved, indeed!" exclaimed De Vigne, involuntarily.

"You could not tell," answered Alma, looking up at him, great tears in her blue eyes. "He died more than three years ago, but it is as fresh to *me* as if it were but yesterday

Nobody will ever love me as he did. He was so kind, so gentle, so good. In losing him I lost everything; I prayed day and night that I might die with him; he was my only friend!"

"Poor little Alma!" said De Vigne, touched out of that haughty reserve now habitual to him. "I am grieved to hear it, both for the loss to you of your only protector, and the loss to the world of as true-hearted a man as ever breathed. If I had been in England he would have seen me at Lorave, as I promised, but I have been in India since we parted. I wish I had written to him; I ought to have done so; but one never knows things till too late."

"He left a letter for you, in case I should ever meet you. You were the only person kind to us after the loss of his fortune," said Alma, as she sprang across the room—all her movements were rapid and foreign—knelt down before a desk, and brought an unsealed envelope to De Vigne, directed to him by a hand now powerless for ever.

"This for me? I wish I had seen him," said De Vigne, as he put it away in the breast of his coat. "I ought to have written to him; but my own affairs engrossed me, and —we are all profound egotists, you know, to whatever unselfishness we may pretend. What was the cause of his death? Will it pain you to tell me?"

"Paralysis. He had a paralytic stroke six months before, which ended in congestion of the brain. But how gentle, how good, how patient he was through it all!"

She stopped again; the tears rolled off her lashes. She was quite unaccustomed to conceal what she felt, and she did not know that feeling is bad *ton!*

"And you have been in England ever since?" asked De Vigne, to divert her thoughts.

"Oh no!" she answered, brushing the tears off her lashes. "You know the governess grandpapa took for me to Lorave? She has been extremely kind. She was with me at his death. I was fifteen then, and for a year afterwards she stayed with me in Lorave; I loved the place so dearly, dearer still after his grave was there, and I could not bear to leave it. But Miss Russell had no money, and no home. She works for her living, and she could not waste her time on me. She was obliged to look for another situation, and when she came over to it—it is in a rector's family

near Staines—I came with her, and she placed me here. My old nurse has this farm; grandpapa bought it for her many years ago, when she left us and married. Her husband is dead, but she still keeps the farm, and makes bread to send into town. It was the only place we knew of, and nurse was so delighted to let me have the rooms, that I have been here ever since."

"Poor little thing, what a life!" cried De Vigne, involuntarily. "How dull you must be, Alma!"

She raised her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders. Gesticulation was natural to her, and she had caught it from the Italians at Lorave.

"Buried alive! Sylvo to talk to, and the flowers to talk to me; that is my society. But wherever I might have been, I should have missed *him* equally, and I can never be alone while I have my easel and my books."

"Have you painted these?" I exclaimed in surprise, for there were masterly strokes in the sketches on the walls that would have shamed more than one "Associate."

"Yes. An Italian artist, spending the summer at Lorave, saw me drawing one day, something as Cimabue saw little Giotto, and had me to his studio, and gave me a regular course of instruction. He told me I might equal Elizabetta Sirani. I shall never do that, I am afraid, but I find a very good sale for my sketches; they take them at Ackerman's and Rowney's, and I work hard. I sketch every day out of doors, to catch the winter and summer tints. But I hate winter: it is so unkind, so cheerless! I always paint Summer in my pictures; not your poor pale English season, but summer golden and glorious, with the boughs hanging to the ground with the weight of their own beauty, and the vineyards and corn-fields glowing with their rich promise!"

"Enthusiastic as ever?" laughed De Vigne, "How are our friends the fairies, Alma?"

"Do you suppose I shall give news of them to a disbeliever?" said Alma, with a toss of her head. "I have not forgotten your want of faith. Are you as great a sceptic now?"

"Ten times more—not only of fairy lore, but of pretty well everything else. Fairies are as well worth credence as all the other faiths of the day; I would as soon credit Queen Mab as, a 'doctrinal point!' What do *you* think of the fairies now?"

"Look! Do you not think I sketched that from sight?" said Alma, turning her easel to him, where she had drawn a true Titania, such as "on pressed flowers does sleep," for whom "the cowslips tall her pensioners be:"

> "Where oxlips and the nodding violets grow,
> Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,
> With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine,
> Lulled in those flowers with dances and delight.";

the veritable fairy queen of those dainty offsprings of romance, who used to meet

> "In grove or green,
> By fountain clear or spangled starlight sheen."

"How splendidly you draw, Alma?" exclaimed De Vigne. "If you exhibited at the Water-Colour Society, you would excite as much wonder as Rosa Bonheur. And do these pay you well?"

"Yes; at least, what seems so to me."

"*Pauvre enfant!*" smiled De Vigne; her ideas of wealth and his were strikingly different. "A friend of mine is a great connoisseur of these things. I must show them to him some day; but I cannot stay now, for I have an engagement at two, and it is now striking."

"But you will come and see me again," interrupted Alma, beseechingly. "Pray do. You cannot think how lonely I am. I have no friends, you know."

"Oh yes, I will come," answered De Vigne. "I have much more to hear about you and your pursuits. How could you know us, Alma, after so long?"

"I did not know Captain Chevasney," said the little lady, with uncomplimentary frankness, "but I knew you perfectly. The first picture I could sketch was one of you for Sir Folko. You know I always thought you like him? Besides, grandpapa talked of you so constantly, and I was so expecting you to come to Lorave with your yacht, as you had promised, that it was impossible for me to forget you. I was so grieved when you did not notice me in Pall Mall. I called you, but you did not hear. You were thinking of that young lady. How lovely she was! Who is she?"

"Lord Molyneux's daughter. I was not thinking of her, though, but that the pair of horses in her carriage were not worth half what I heard they gave for them," said

De Vigne, laughing, as he offered her his hand; "and now, good-bye. I am very pleased to have found you out, and you must pardon us our impertinence in calling on one whom we thought a stranger, since it has led us to one whom we may fairly claim as an old friend?"

Alma looked gratefully in his face, and bid him, with a radiant smile, not defer his visit to St. Crucis, as he had done his yachting to Lorave. She guessed little enough *what* had prevented that yachting to Lorave.

"Strange we should have lighted on that child! That's your doing, Arthur, going after the beaux yeux!" said he, as we drove to the Dilcoosha. "She is the same frank, impulsive, enthusiastic little thing as when we first saw her. She was the heiress of Wieve Hurst then; now she has to work for her bread. Who can prophesy the ups and downs of life? Boughton Tressillian was game to the backbone. Perhaps she inherits some of his pluck—it is to be hoped so—she will want it. A woman, young, unprotected, and attractive as she looks, is pretty sure to come to grief some way or other. Her very virtues will be her ruin! She is not one of your sensible, prudent, cold, common-place women, who go through the world scathless; too wise to err, too selfish to sacrifice themselves! Alma will come to grief, I am afraid. Here, take the reins, Arthur, and I will see what her grandfather says."

He tore open the letter, and gave a long whistle.

"What's the matter?" said I.

"She isn't his grandchild after all."

"Not? His daughter, I suppose?"

"No; no relation at all. The letter is broken off unfinished; probably where his hand failed him, poor old man. He says my name recurred to him as the only person who had not heeded his decline of fortune, and the only man of honour whom he could trust. Out of his income as consul he contrived to save her a few hundreds—*voilà tout!* He must leave her, of course, to struggle for herself! and this is what weighs so heavily upon him, because, it seems, he adopted this child when she was two years old, believing he would make her an heiress; and, according to his view of the case, he considers he has done her a great wrong. Who she is he does not tell me, except that she was a little Italian girl. He was going, no doubt, to add

more, as he began the letter by saying he wished her secret to be known to some one, and having heard much of my mother, appealed to her, through me, to aid and serve Alma if she would; but here the sentence breaks off unfinished."

"Do you think Alma knows it; she calls him her grandfather still?"

"Can't say—yet of course she does," said De Vigne, with a cynical smile. "No woman's curiosity ever allowed her to keep an unsealed letter three years and never look into it! Here we are. It will be as well not to tell Sabretasche of his neighbour, eh? He is such a deuced fellow for women, and she would be certain to go down before his thousand-and-one accomplishments! Not that it would matter much, perhaps; she will be somebody's prey, no doubt, and she might as well be the Colonel's, save that he is a little quicker fickle than most, knowing better than most the value of his toys."

With which concluding sarcasm De Vigne threw the reins to his groom, who met him at the door, and entered that abode of perfect taste and epicurean luxury, known as the Dilcoosha, where Sabretasche and luncheon were waiting for us. And where, after due discussion of Strasbourg pâtés, Comet Hock, Bass, and the news of the day, we inspected the chesnut's paces, pronounced him pretty certain, unless something unforeseen in the way of twitch and opium-ball occurred, to win, and drove back to town together, De Vigne to dine at the Rag, go to a theatre for half an hour, and end at Pratts', and I to call on a certain lady who had well-nigh broken my heart, when it was young and breakable, who had exchanged rings with me under the Kensington Garden trees, when she was fresh, fair, Gwen Brandling, and who was now staying in town as Madame la Duchesse de la Vieillecour, black velvet and point replacing the muslin and ribbons, dignity in the stead of girlish grace, and a *fin sourire* of skilled coquetry in lieu of that heartfelt smile, Gwen's whilom charm. I take it doves are sold by the dozen on the altar-steps of St. George's? but—it is true that the doves have a strange passion for the gold coins that buy them, and would not fly away if they could.

*N'importe!* Madame de la Vieillecour and I met as became people living in good society; if less fresh she was, perhaps, more fascinating, and though one begins life tender and

transparent as Sèvres, one is stone-china, luckily, long before the finish, warranted never to break at any blows whatever.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### HOW A WIFE TALKED OF HER HUSBAND.

In a very gay and gaudy drawing-room in the Champ Elysées, in an arm-chair, with her feet on a *chaufferette*, in a rich cashmere and laces, looking a very imposing and richly-coloured picture, sat De Vigne's wife, none the less handsome for the wear of Paris life, intermixed with visits to the Bads, where she was almost as great an attraction as the green tables, and the sound of her name as great a charm as the irresistible "*Faites votre jeu, messieurs!*" A little fuller about the cheek and chin, a trifle more Junoesque in form, a little higher tinted in the carnation hue of her roses, but otherwise none the worst for the ten years that had passed since she wore the orange-blossoms and the diamond ceinture on her marriage morning.

She had an English paper in her hand, and was running her eye over the fashionable intelligence. Opposite to her was old Fantyre, her nose a little more hooked, her eye sharper, her rouge higher, a little more dirty, witty, and detestable than of yore; taking what she called a *demie-tasse*, but which looked uncommonly like cognac uncontaminated by Mocha. And these two led a very pleasant life in Paris; with the old lady's quick wits, questionable introductions, and imperturbable impudence, and the younger one's beauty, riches, and excessive freedom!

"What's the matter, my dear?" asked Lady Fantyre; "you don't look best pleased."

"I am *not* pleased," said the Trefusis (such I must call her), her brow dark, and her full under-lip protruded. "De Vigne is back."

"Dear, dear! how tiresome!" cried the Fantyre; "and just when you'd begun to hope he'd been killed in India. Well, that *is* annoying. It's a nice property to be kept out of, ain't it? But you see, my dear, strong men of his age are not good ones to be heir to, even with all the chances of war. So he's come back, is he? What for, I wonder?"

"Here it is, among the arrivals: 'Claridge's Hotel: Major De Vigne.' He is come back because he is tired of the East, probably. I wonder if he will come to Paris? I should like to meet him." And the Trefusis laughed, showing her white teeth.

"Why, my dear? To give him a dose of aconite? No, you're too prudent to do anything of that sort. Whatever other commandments you break, my dear, it won't be the Sixth, because there's a capital punishment for it," said the old lady, chuckling at the idea. "You'd like to meet him, you say—I shouldn't. I don't forget his face in the vestry! Lord! how he did look! his face as white as a corpse, and as fierce as the devil's.

"Did you ever see the devil?" sneered the Trefusis.

"Yes, my dear—in a scarlet cashmere; and very well he looks in women's clothes, too," said the Fantyre, with a diabolical grin.

The Trefusis laughed too.

"*He* has found me dangerous, at any rate."

"Well, yes: everybody has, I think, that has the pleasure of your acquaintance," chuckled Lady Fantyre. "But I don't think so much of your revenge, myself. Very poor! What's three thousand a year out of his property? And as for not letting him marry, I think that's oftener kindness than cruelty to a man. Don't you think it would have been better to have queened it at Vigne, and had an establishment in Eaton-square, and spent his twenty thousand a year for him, and made yourself a London leader of fashion, and ridden over the necks of those haughty Ferrers people, and all his stiff-necked friends—that beautiful creature, Vivian Sabretasche, among 'em. What do you think, eh?"

"It might have been better for me, but it would have spoilt my revenge. He would have left me sooner or later, and as he is infinitely too proud and reserved a man to have told any living soul the secret of his disgrace, I should have lost the one grand sting in my vengeance—the humiliation before the world."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear, a man of fortune is never humiliated; the world's too fond of him! The sins of the fathers are only visited on the children where the children are going down in the world." (The Fantyre might be a nasty old woman, but she spoke greater truths than most good people.)

"So you sacrificed your aggrandisement to your revenge? Not over sensible, that."

"You can't accuse me of often yielding to any weakness," said the Trefusis, with a look in her eye like a vicious mare's. "However, my revenge is not finished yet."

"Eh? Not? What's the next act? On my word, you're a clever woman, Lucy. You do my heart good."

The first time, by the way, that Lady Fantyre ever acknowledged to a heart, or the Trefusis received such a compliment.

"This. I know his nature—you do not. Some day or other De Vigne will love again, and passionately. *Then* he will want to be free; then, indeed, he shall realise the force of the fetters by which I hold him."

The old lady chuckled over the amusing prospect.

"Very likely, my dear. It's just what they can't do, that they always want to do. Tell a man wine's good for him, and forbid him water, he'd forswear his cellar, and run to the pump immediately! And if you heard that he'd fallen in love, what would you do?"

"Go to England, and put myself between her and him, as his deserted, injured, much enduring, and loving wife."

Old Fantyre drank up her coffee, and nodded approvingly.

"That's right, my dear! Play your game. Play it out; only take care to keep the honours in your own hand, and never trump your partner's card."

"Not much fear of my doing that," said the Trefusis, with a smile.

There was not, indeed; she marked her cards too cleverly, for she was keen enough to be Queen of the Paris Greeks.

## CHAPTER XV.

### "L'AMITIÉ EST L'AMOUR SANS AILES."

SCARCELY anyone was in town except a few very early birds, heralds of the coming season, and the Members, victims to an unpitying nation; but there was still some people one knew dotted about in Belgravia and Park-lane, others in jointure-houses or villas up "Tamese Ripe," among them a very pretty widow, Leila Lady Puffdoff, who dwelt

in the retirement of her dower-house at Twickenham, and enlivened the latter portion of her veuvage by *matinées musicales*, breakfasts, and luncheons for some of those dear friends who had been the detestation of *le feu* Puffdoff. To a combination of all three, Sabretasche, De Vigne, Curly, a man called Monckton, and myself, drove in De Vigne's drag a day or two after our rencontre with little Alma Tressillian.

"An amateur affair, isn't it?" asked De Vigne. "Artistes' morning concerts are bad enough, where Italian singers barbarise 'Annie Laurie' into an allegro movement with shakes and aspeggios, and English singers scream Italian with vile British o's and a's; but amateur *matinées musicales*, where highly-finished young beauties in becoming morning toilettes excruciate one's ears, whether they have melody in their voices or no, just because they have been taught by Garcia or Gardoni, are absolutely unbearable. Don't you think so, you worshipper of harmony?"

"I? Certainly," responded Sabretasche. "As a rule, I shun all amateur things. Where professional people, who have applied sixteen hours a day, all their energies, and all their capabilities, to one subject, even then rarely succeed, how is it possible but that the performances of those who take up the study as a pastime must be a miserable failure, or at best but second-rate? Occasionally, however (indeed, *whenever* you see it, but the sight is so rare!), talent will do for you without study more than study ever will—"

"As you will show us in your songs this morning, I suppose?' laughed Monckton.

"If I sang ill I should never sing at all," replied Sabretasche, carelessly, with that consciousness of power which true talent is sure to have, as it is as sure *not* to have undue self-appreciation. "I mean, however, in Miss Molyneux's Aria; even you will admire that, De Vigne."

Sabretasche was quite right; it was a treat to hear Violet Molyneux's rich, passionate, bell-like voice. We had heard nothing like it of late; and Violet's voice was really one which, as a professional, would have ranked her very high. Besides, there was a tone in it, a certain freshness and gladness, mingled with a strange pathos and

passion, which moved even those among her auditors most *blasés*, most fastidious, and most ready to sneer, into silence and admiration.

"That is music," said De Vigne, in the door of the music-room. "If she would sing at morning concerts I would forswear them no longer. Look at that fellow; if he be ever really caught at all, it will be by her voice."

I looked at "that fellow," being Sabretasche, who leaned against the organ, close to Violet Molyneux; his face was calm and impassive as ever, but his melancholy eyes were fixed upon her with such intense earnestness, that Violet, glancing up at him as she sang, coloured despite all her self-possession, and her voice was unsteady for half a note. Lauzun though the Colonel was, I believe Violet's voice pleased him still more than her beauty. The latter beguiled the senses, as many others had before; the former beguiled the soul, a far rarer charm!

"You came late; half our concert was over?" said Violet to him, as they stood talking in a winter-garden, one of the whims—and a very charming whim, too —of the Puffdoff's.

"I came in time to sing what I had promised, and to hear what I desired, your—"

"You did like it?"

"Too well to compliment you on it. I 'liked' it as I liked, or rather I *felt* it—as I have felt, occasionally, the tender and holy beauty of Raphael, the hushed glories of a summer night, the mystical chimes of a starlit sea. Your voice did me good, as those things did, until the feverish fret and noise of practical life wore off their influence again."

Violet gave a deep sigh of delight.

"You make me so happy! I often think that the doctrine of immortality has no better plea than the vague yearning for something unseen and unconceived, the unuttered desire which rises in us, at the sound of true music. I have heard music at which I could have shed more bitter tears than any I have known, for I have had no sorrow, and which answered the restless passions of my heart better than any human mind that ever wrote."

"Quite true; and that is why, to me, music is one of the strangest gifts to men. Painting creates, but creates by

me yours, I will do my best to merit it, and to keep myself to it. Now let us go. I like too well to be with you to dare be with you long."

"What does Sabretasche mean with Molyneux's daughter?" said De Vigne to me in a *cabinet de peinture*, De Vigne having only just escaped from the harpy's clutch of the little Countess's fairy fingers.

"How should I tell? He's a confounded inconstant fellow, you know. He's always flirting with some woman or other."

"Flirtation doesn't make men look as he looked while he listened to her. Flirtation amuses. Sabretasche is not amused here, but rather, I should say, intensely worried."

"What should worry him? He could marry the girl if he wished."

"How can you tell?"

"Well, I suppose so. The Molyneux would let him have her fast enough. Her mother wants to get her off; she doesn't like two milliner's bills. But *you* interesting yourself in a love affair! What a Saul among the prophets?"

"Spare your wit, Arthur. I never meddle with such tinder, I assure you. I am not overfond of my fellow-creatures, but I don't hate them intensely enough to help them to marry. I say, have you not been sufficiently bored here? The concert is over. Let us go, shall we?"

"With pleasure. I say you have not paid your promised visit to little Tressillian. 'Tisn't far; we might walk over, eh?"

"So we will. Are you after poor Alma's *chevelure dorée* already?" laughed De Vigne. "Make her mistress of Longholme, Chevasney, and I'll give her away to you with pleasure. I won't be a party to other conditions, for her grandfather's sake—her guardian's sake, rather. By the way, I must make out whether she knows or not that the relationship was a myth."

"Thank you. I have no private reason for proposing the call, except the always good and excellent one of passing the time and seeing a pretty woman. There is the Puffdoff coming after you again. Let's go away while we can."

We were soon out of that little bijou of a dower-house

that shrined the weeds and wiles of the late Puffdoff's handsome Countess, and smoking our cigars, as we walked across to Richmond.

Alma was sitting at her easel, with her back to the door, painting earnestly, with little Sylvo at her side. She was dressed prettily, inexpensively, I have no doubt, but somehow more picturesquely than many of the women in hundred guinea dresses and point worth a dowry—the picturesqueness of artistic taste and innate refinement, which gave her the brilliance and grace of a picture. She turned rapidly at the closing of the door, sprang up, and ran towards De Vigne with that impulsiveness which always made her seem much younger than she was.

"Ah! you *have* come at last! I began to think you would cheat me as you cheated me of the yachting trip to Lorave; and yet I thought you would not disappoint me."

"No, but I shall scold you," said De Vigne, "for sitting there, wearing your eyes out—as Mrs. Lee phrases it—over your easel. Why do you do it?"

"It is my only companion," pleaded Alma. "With my brush I can escape away into an ideal world, and shut out the real and actual, with all its harshness, trials, and privations. You know the sun shines only for me upon canvas; and besides," she added, with a gay smile, "to take a practical view of it, I must make what talent I have into gold."

"Poor little thing!" exclaimed De Vigne. It struck him, who had flung about thousands at his pleasure ever since he was a boy, as singular, and as somehow unjust, that this girl, young as she was, should have to labour for her living with the genius with which nature had endowed her so royally—genius the divine, the god-given, the signet-seal, so rare, so priceless, with which nature marks the few who are to ennoble and sanctify the mass!

"Ah! I *am* a poor little thing?" repeated Alma, with a *moue mutine* indicative of supreme self-pity and indignation at her fate. "I should love society; I see nothing but nurse and Sylvo. "I love fun; I have nobody to talk to but the goldfinch. I hate solitude, and I am always alone. I should like beautiful music, beautiful pictures, gardens, statues, conservatories, luxuries."

"More honour to you to bear it so well, Miss Tressillian," said I.

"Oh, I don't bear it well," interrupted Alma. "I sometimes get as impatient as a bird beating its wings against a cage; I grow as restless in its monotony as you can fancy. I am not a philosopher, and never shall be."

"Life will make you one in spite of yourself," said De Vigne.

"Never! If I ever come to rose-leaves. I will lie down on them *coûte qui coûte*. As long as I can only get a straw mattress, there is not much virtue in renunciation."

"But there are cankerous worms in rose-leaves," smiled De Vigne.

"But who would ever enjoy the roses if they were always remembering that? Where is the good?"

"You little epicurean!" laughed De Vigne, looking at her amusedly. His remembrance of her as a child made him treat her with a certain gentle familiarity. "You would have a brief summer, like the butterflies. That sort of summer costs dear, when the butterfly lies dying on the brown autumn leaves, and envies the bee housed safely at home."

"*N'importe!*" cried the little lady, recklessly. "The butterfly, at least, has enjoyed life, and the bee, I would bet, goes on humming and bustling all the year round, never knowing whether the fuchsias are red or white, as long as there is honey in them; only looking in orchises with an eye to business, and never giving a minute in his breathless toil to scent the heliotropes, or kiss the bluebells for their beauty's sake!"

"Possibly not; but when the fuchsias and orchises, bluebells and heliotropes, are withered and dried, and raked away by ruthless gardeners for the unpoetic destiny of making leaf mould; and the ground is frozen, and the trees are bare, and the wind whistles over the snow—how then? Which is the best off, butterfly or bee?"

"Hold your tongue!" laughed Alma. "You put me in mind of those horrible moral apologues, and that detestable incitement to supreme selfishness, '*La cigale ayant chanté tout l'été*,' where the ant is made out a most praiseworthy person, but appears to me simply cruel and mean. But to answer you is easy enough. What good does the bee get from his hard work? Has his honey taken away from him for other people's eating, and is

smoked out of his house, poor little thing, by human monsters, whom, if he knew his power, he could sting to death! The butterfly, on the contrary, enjoys himself to the last, dies in the course of nature, and leaves others to enjoy themselves after him."

"You did not lose your tongue in Lorave, Alma?" said De Vigne, with a grave air of solicitous interest.

With the little Tressillian he had a little of his old fun, something of his old laugh.

"No, indeed; and I should be very sorry if I had, for I love talking."

"You need not tell us that," smiled De Vigne.

"I will never talk to you again," cried Alma, with supreme dignity: "or, rather, I never would if I were not too magnanimous to avenge an insult by such enormous punishment."

"To yourself. Just so. You are quite right," said De Vigne, with an amused smile. "What are you painting now, Alma? May we see?"

"I was drawing you," she answered, turning the easel towards him. It was a really wonderful portrait from memory, done in pastels.

"My likeness? By Jove!" cried De Vigne, "what on earth put it into your head, *petite*, to do that?"

"I knew you would make a splendid picture—your face is beautiful," answered Alma, tranquilly.

Whereon De Vigne went into a fit of laughter, the first real laughter that I had heard since his marriage-day.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Alma; "I only tell you the truth."

At which gratifying assurance De Vigne laughed still more. The girl amused him, as Richelieu's and Montaigne's little cats amused them when they laid down the sceptre and the pen, and tied the string to their kittens' corks. And thinking of her still merely as Tressillian's little granddaughter, he was not on his guard with her as with other women, and treated her with cordiality and freedom.

"Well, Alma, I am extremely obliged to you. You have made a much handsomer fellow of me than Maclise would have done, I am afraid," said he, smiling; "and if ever my picture is wanted side by side with Wellington's, I hope, for the sake of creating an impression on posterity, that you will be kind enough to paint it for me."

"It is not more handsome than you," said Alma, resolutely. "It is too bad of you to laugh so, but that is like men's ingratitude."

"Don't abuse us," said De Vigne; "that is so stale a stage-trick! Women are eternally running after us, and eternally vowing that they would not stir a step for any of us. They spend their whole existence in trying to catch us, but their whole breath reiterating that they only take us out of compassion. If I hear a lady abuse or find fault with us, I know that her grapes '*sont trop verts, et bons pour des goujats.*'"

Alma laughed:

"Very probably. But I don't abuse you. I prefer yours to my own sex. Your code of honour is far better than ours."

"The generality of women have no notion of honour at all!" said De Vigne; "they tell falsehoods and circulate scandals without being called to account for it, and the laxity of honour in trifles that they learn in the nursery and school-rooms corrodes their sense of right towards others in all their after-life. A boy at school is soon taught that however lax he may be in other things, it is 'sneaky' to peach, and learns a rough sort of Spartan honour; a girl, on the contrary, tell tales of her sisters unreproved, and hears mamma in her drawing-room take away the character of a 'dearest friend' whom she sees her meet the next moment with a caress and an endearment. But modern society is too 'religious' to remember to be honourable; and is too occupied with proclaiming its 'morality' to have any time to give to common honesty."

"As Sir John Lacquers taught us!"

"Lacquers and scores like him, whose slips are passed over because their scrip is inscribed with a large text and pilgrim's purse full of Almighty Dollars. I think of publishing a 'Manual of Early Lessons for Eminent Christians:' I. Do good so that not only your right hand knows it, but all your neighbourhood likewise. II. Give as it is likely to be given unto you. III. Strain very hard at a sin the size of a gnat if it be your poor relation's, and swallow one the size of a camel if it be your patron's. IV. Never pray in your closet, as no one will be the wiser, but go as high as you can on the housetop, that society may thing you the holiest man in Israel. V. Borrow of your friend without paying him,

because he will not harm you, but give good interest to strangers, because they may have the law on you. VI. Judge severely, that gaining applause for your condemnation of others you may contrive to hide your own shortcomings. VII. Eat *pâtés de foie gras* in secrecy but have *jours maigres* in public, that men who cannot see you in secret may reward you openly! I could write a whole Paraphrase of the Gospel as used and translated by the 'Church of England' and other elect of the kingdom of Heaven; an election, by the way, exceedingly like that of Themistocles, where every man writes down his own name first, entirely regardless of lack of right or qualification for the honour!"

"But different in this respect," said Alma, "that there the generals *did* remember to put Themistocles after them; whereas the shining lights of the different creeds are a great deal too occupied with securing their own future comfort to think of drawing any of their brothers up with them. The churches all take a cross for their symbol! they would be nearer the truth if they took the beam without the transverse; for egotism is more their point than self-sacrifice! But will you look at my pet picture?"

The picture she spoke of stood with its face to the wall. As she turned it round, De Vigne and I gave an involuntary exclamation of surprise, it so far surpassed anything we should have fancied a girl of her age could have accomplished. The picture was one not possible to criticise chilly by exacting rules of art and of perspective. One looked at it as Murillo looked at the first Madonna of his wonderful mulatto, not to discuss critically, but to admire the genius stamped upon it, to admire the vivid breathing vitality, the delicate grace, and wonderful power marked upon its canvas.

De Vigne looked at it silently while Alma spoke; he continued silent some minutes after she had ceased; then he turned suddenly:

"Alma, if you choose, you can be as great a woman as Elizabeth Sirani—a greater than Rosa Bonheur, because what she gives to horses and cows, you will give to human nature. Be content. Whatever sorrows or privations come to you, you will have God's best gift, which no man can take away, the greatest prize in life—genius!"

Alma looked up at him, her eyes brilliant as diamonds, her whole face flushed, her lips trembling.

"You think so? Thank God! I would have died to hear you say that."

"Better live to prove it!" said De Vigne, mournfully. "Your picture is both well conceived and well carried out: it tells its own story; the imagining of it is poetic, the treatment artistic. There are faults, no doubt, but I like it too well to look out for them. Will you let me have it at my house a little while? I have some friends who are artists, others who are cognoscenti, and I should like to hear their opinion on it."

"Will you keep it?" asked Alma, with the first shyness I had seen in her. "If you would hang it anywhere in your house, and just look at it now and then, I should be so glad. Will you?"

"I will keep it with pleasure, my dear child; but I will keep it as I would Landseer's, or Mulready's, by being allowed the pleasure of adding it to my collection. Your picture is worth—"

"Oh, don't talk of 'worth!'" cried Alma, vehemently. "Take it—take it, as I give it you with all my heart! I am so glad to give you anything, you were so kind to *him!* Did he say anything in his letter to you that I might hear?"

De Vigne turned quickly.

"Did you not read it? It was unsealed."

"Read it? No! You could not think for a moment that another person's letter was less sacred to me because it happened to be unsealed! That is not your own code, I should say. What right have you to suppose me more dishonourable than yourself?"

Her eyes sparkled dangerously, the colour was hot in her cheeks, the imputation had roused her spirit, and her fiery indignation was as becoming as it was amusing.

"I beg your pardon. I was wrong," said De Vigne. You have a man's sense of honour, not a woman's; I am glad of it. Your grandpapa says very little. It was merely to ask me if I met you, to be your friend. It is little enough I can ever aid you in, and my friendship will be of little use to you; but such as it is, it will be yours, if you like to take it."

She held her hand out to him by way of answer! There were too many tears in her voice for her to trust herself to say anything.

"You do not remember your parents at all?" asked De Vigne.

She shook her head.

"I remember no home but Weive Hurst. Nurse told me both died when I was a baby, and that grandpapa could never bear me to mention them to him: I don't know why. How happy I was at Weive Hurst! I wonder if I shall ever be again?"

"To be sure you will," said De Vigne, kindly. "You have a capacity for happiness, and are gay under heavy clouds; at eighteen no one has said good-bye to all the sunshine of life. Well, you have read Monte Christo? You must remember his last words?"

"'*Attendre et espérer!*'" repeated Alma. "To me they are the saddest words in human language. They are so seldom the joy-bells to herald a new future—they are so often the death-knell to a past wasted in futile striving and disappointed desire. '*Attendre et espérer!*'" How many golden days pass in trusting to those words; and when their trust be at last recompensed, how often the fulfilment comes too late to be enjoyed. '*Attendre et espérer!*' Ah! that is all very well for those who have some fixed goal in view—some aim which they will attain if they have but energy and patience enough to go steadily on to the end; but only to wait for an indefinite better fate, which year after year retreats still farther—only to hope against hope for what never comes, and in all probability will never come—*that* is not quite so easy."

"If not, it is the lot of all. I agree with you, nothing chafes and frets one more than waiting; it wears all the bloom off the fruit to waste all our golden hours gazing at it afar off, and longing for it with Tantalus thirst. It has never suited me. I have too often brushed the bloom off mine plucking them too soon. I agree with you, to wait for happiness is a living death, to hope for it is a dreamer's phantasy; but it is not like your usual doctrine, you little enthusiast, who are still such a child that you believe in the possible realisation of all your fond ideals? What were you saying to me the other day at Strawberry Hill about Chatterton, that if the poor boy had only had the courage to wait and hope, he might have reaped long years of honour and fame?"

"But Chatterton had an aim; and he had more; be had

genius. I know he was goaded to madness by poverty. I know how bitter must have been the weary fret of thinking what he should eat, and wherewithal he should be clothed, the jar and grind of every-day wants, of petty, inexorable cares. At the same time, I wonder that he did not live for his works: that for their sake he did not suffer and endure; that he did not live to make the world acknowledge all that marked him out from the common herd. I know how he wearied of life; yet I wished he had conquered it. Genius should ever be stronger than its detractors. 'What is the use of my writing poetry that no one reads?' asked Shelley. Yet he knew that the time would come when it would be read by men wiser than those of his generation, and he wrote on, following the inspiration of his own divine gift. Men know and acknowledge now *how* divine a gift it was."

"True," answered De Vigne; "wrestle with fate, and it will bless you, is a wise and a right counsel; still here and there in that wrestling-match it is possible to get a *croc en jambe*, which leaves us at the mercy of Fate, do what we may to resist her. Men of genius have very rarely been appreciated in their own time. Too often nations spend wealth upon a monument to him whom they let die for want of a shilling. Too many, like Cervantes, have lacked bread while they penned what served to make their country honoured and illustrious. They could write of him:

'Porque se digua que uno mano herida
Pudo dar à su dueño eterna vida;'

but they could leave him to poverty for all that. A prophet has no honour in his own country, still less in his own time; but if the prophets be true and wise men they will not look for honour, but follow Philip Sydney's counsel, look in their own hearts and write, and leave the seed in their brain as ploughmen the corn in their furrows—content that it will bring forth a harvest at the last, if it be ripe, good wheat."

"Yet it is sad if they are forced to see only the dark and barren earth, and the golden harvest only rise to wave over their tomb?"

"It is; but, petite, there are few things *not* sad in life, and one of the saddest of them is, as Emerson says, 'the madness with which the passing age mischooses the object on

which all candles shine, and all eyes are turned.' The populace who crowded to look at Charles and Louise de Kerouaille coming to Hampton never knew or thought of Cromwell's Latin secretary, dictating in his study, old, blind, and poor. Well, it only shows us what fools men are, either to court the world or care for it! *A propos* of *celèbres*, Alma, you, vowed as you are to historic associations, should never be dull here, with all the souvenirs that are round Richmond and Twickenham."

"Ah!" said Alma, turning her bright beaming face on him, "how often I think of them all!—of the talk round that little deal table in the Grotto; of Swift, with his brilliant azure eyes, and his wonderful satire, and his exigeant selfish loves; of Mrs. Clive, with her humorous stories; of Harry Fielding, laughing as he wrote his scenes, and packing away his papers to eat his scrag of mutton as gleefully as if it were an entremêt; of Walpole, fitting up a Gothic chapel and writing for a Paris suit, publishing 'Otranto,' and talking scandals in Boodle's—how often I think of them!"

"You need not tell me that," laughed De Vigne. "With your historic passion, you live in the past. Well! it is safer and less deceptive, if not less visionary, than living in the future."

"Perhaps I do both; yet I have little to hope from the future."

"Why?" said De Vigne, kindly. "Who knows but what one of your old favourites, the fairies, may bring good gifts to their little queen? We will hope so, at least."

Alma shook her head. "I am afraid not. The only fairy that has any power now is Money; and the good gifts the gods give us now-a-days, only go to those who have golden coffers to put them in!"

The morning after, while De Vigne was breakfasting, the cart that brought in Mrs. Lee's home-made bread to town left at his house Alma's picture; she had looked, I suppose, for his address in the Court Guide, and remembered her promise, though I am afraid the recipient of her gift had forgotten the subject altogether.

When it came, however, he hung it in a good light, and pointed it out to Sabretasche, who dined with him that night to meet a mutual Paris friend.

"What do you think of that picture, Colonel?" he said,

as we came into the drawing-room for a rubber. Whist was no great favourite with De Vigne; he preferred the rapidity and exciting whirl of looor lansquenet; but he played it well, and Sabretasche and De Cassagnac were especially fond of it. It suited the Colonel to lean back in a soft chair, and make those calm, subtle combinations. He said the game was so deliciously tranquil and silent!

Sabretasche set down his coffee-cup, put his glass in his eye, and lounged up to it.

"Of this water-colour? I like it exceedingly. Where did you get it? It is not the style of any one I know; it is more like one of your countrymen's, Cassagnac, eh? It wants toning down; the light through that stained window is a trifle too bright, but the boy's face is perfect. I would give something to have idealised it; and the hair is as soft as silk. I like it extremely, De Vigne. Where did you get it?"

"I picked it up by accident. It pleased my eye, and I wanted to know if my eye led me right. I know you are a great connoisseur.'"

"There is true power in it, and an exquisite delicacy of touch. The artist is young, isn't he? Do you know him?"

"Slightly. He works for his livelihood, and is only eighteen."

"Eighteen? By Jove! if the boy go on as he has begun, he will beat Maclise and Ingress. Has he ever tried his hands at oils?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"It's a pity he shouldn't. He works for his livelihood, you say? If he will do me a picture as good as this, leaving the subject to himself, I will give him fifty guineas for it, if he think that sufficient. Some day, when we have nothing better to do, you will take me to his studio—a garret in Poland-Street, probably, is it not? Those poor wretches! How they live on bread-and-cheese and a pipe of bird's-eye, I cannot conceive! If the time ever come when I have my turbot and hock no longer, I shall resort to an overdose of morphia. What is the value of life when life is no longer enjoyment?"

"Yes," suggested De Vigne, "if only those were alive who enjoyed living, the earth would be barren very speedily, I fancy."

"That depends on how you read enjoyment," said De Cassagnac.

"Enjoyment is easily enough defined—taking pleasure in things, and having things in which to take pleasure! Some men have the power to enjoy, and not the opportunity; others the opportunity and not the power; the combination of both makes the enjoyment, I take it."

"But enjoyment is a very different thing to different men. Enjoyment for Sabretasche, lies in *soirées*, like the Gore House, or Madame de Sablé's, wine as good as your claret, women as pretty as La Dorah, good music, good painting, and immeasurable dolce Enjoyment lies, for Professor Owen, in the fossil tooth of an ichthyosaurus; for an Italian lazzarone, in sun, dirt, and maccaroni; for a woman, in dress, conquests, and tall footmen; for the Tipton Slasher, in the belt, undisputed: enjoyments are as myriad as the stars."

"I know what you mean, my dear fellow," said Sabretasche, dropping his eye-glass, and taking up his cup again. "You mean that Hodge, the bricklayer, goes home covered with whitewash, sits down to Dutch cheese, with the brats screaming about, with the same relish as I sit down to my very best-served dinner. It is true, so far, that I should rather be in purgatory than in whitewash, should turn sick at the cheese, murder the children and kill my own self afterwards; and that Hodge, by dint of habit and blunted senses, can support life where I should end it in pure self-defence. But I do not believe that Hodge enjoys himself—how should he, poor wretch! with not a single *agrément* of life? He does not know all he misses, and he is not much better than the beast of the field; but at the same time he only endures life, he can't be said to enjoy it. I agree with De Vigne, that there is but one definition of enjoyment, and the 'two handfuls, with quiet and contentment of spirit,' is a poetic myth, for poverty and enjoyment can by no means run in tandem."

"And contentment is another myth," added De Vigne. "If a man has all he wants, he is contented, because he has no wish beyond, and is a happy man; if he has not what he wants, and is conscious of something lacking, he cannot be called contented, for he is not so."

"Precisely! I don't look to be contented, that is not in the lot of man; all I ask are the *agréments* and refinements of life, and without them life is a curse. Neither Diogenes,

imiting himself to cabbages and water, nor Alexander, drunk with the conquest of the empires, was one bit more contented at heart than the other. Discontent prompted the one to quit mankind and cast off wealth, the other to rule mankind and amass wealth."

"And, after all, there is no virtue in contentment, since contentment is satisfaction in one's lot; there is far more virtue in endurance—strong, manful, steady endurance—of a fate that is adverse, and which one admits to be such, but against which one still fights hard. Patience is all very well, but pluck is better," said De Vigne. "The tables are set. Shall we cut for partners? You and Cassagnac! Chevasney and I may give ourselves up for lost!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE FAWN ROBIN HOOD WAS TO SPARE.

De Vigne never did anything by halves, to use a sufficiently expressive, if not over-elegant, colloquialism. He hated and mistrusted women, not individually, but sweepingly, *en masse*. At the same time, there were in him, naturally, too much chivalry and generosity not to make him pity the "Little Tressillian," and show her kindness to the best of his power. In the first place the girl was alone, and had no money; in the second, he had known her as a child, still held her as such, indeed, and never thought of classing her among his detested "*beau sexe;*" in the third, the letter of Boughton Tressillian had in a way recommended her to his care, and though De Vigne would have been the first to laugh at another man who had taken up a girl of eighteen as a *protégée*, and made sure no harm could come of it, he really looked on Alma as a child, though a very attractive and interesting child it is true, and would have stared at you if you had made his kindness to her the subject of one of those jests customary on the acquaintance of a man about town and an unprotected girl. As he had promised, he picked out some of the choicest books of his library,—not such as young ladies read generally, but such as it might be better if they did—and sent them to her, with the reviews and periodicals of the month. He sent her, too, a handsome parrot, for her

to teach, he said, she being such an admirable adept in the locutory art, and ordered her a cartload of flowers to put her in mind of Weive Hurst.

"Her room looked so pitifully dull, poor child!" said he, one morning, when I was lunching with him. "Those flowers will brighten it up a little. Raymond, did you send Robert down with those things to Richmond?"

"Yes, Major."

I chanced to look at the man as he spoke; he was the new valet, a smooth, fair-faced fellow, really gentlemanlike to look at, not, *ça va sans dire*, the "gentlemanism" of high breeding, but the gentlemanlyism of many an oily parson or sleek parvenu. There was a sly twinkle in his light eyes, and a quick, fox-like glance, as he answered his master, which looked as if he at least attached some amusement to the Major's acquaintance with the pretty artiste.

De Vigne, unhappily, never remembered the presence of servants; he thought they had no more eyes or ears than the chairs or tables around them. They served him as the plates or the glasses did, and they were no more than those to him; though more mischief, reports, and *embrouillements* have come from the prying eyes, coarse tongues, and second-hand slanders of those "necessary evils" than we ever dream of, for the buzz of the servants' hall is often as poisonous as the subdued murmur of the scandal-retailing boudoir above-stairs.

How it came about, I don't know, but Alma, some way or other, was not long kept *in petto*. Some three weeks after Sabretasche, Curly, Severn, Castleton, and one or two other men, were at De Vigne's house. We had been playing Baccarat, his favourite game, and were now supping, between three and four, chatting of two-year olds and Derby prophecies, of bon mots and beauties, of how Mademoiselle Fifine had fleeced little Pulteney, and Bob Green's roan mare won a handicap for 200 sovs., of Lilla Dorah's last extravagance in the "shady groves of the Evangelist," and of the decidedly bad ankles now displayed to us at Her Majesty's; with similar floating topics of the town.

It was curious to see the difference between men's outer and inner lives. There was Sabretasche lying back in the very easiest chair in the room, witty, charming, urbane, with not a trace on his calm delicate features of the care within

him that he had bade Violet Molyneux not tempt him to unveil. There was Tom Severn, of the Queen's Bays, with twenty "*in re's*" hanging over his head, and a hundred "little bills" on his mind, going to the dogs by express train, who had been playing away as if he had had Coutts' to back him. There was Wyndham, with as dark and melancholy a past as ever pursued a man, a past of which I know he repented, not in ostentatious sackcloth and ashes, but bitterly and unfeignedly in silence and humility, tossing down Moet's with a gay laugh and a ready jest, as agreeable in the card-room as he was eloquent in the Lower House. There was Charlie Fitzhardinge, who, ten years ago, had accidentally killed his youngest brother—a Benjamin tenderly and deeply loved by him, and had never ceased to be haunted by that fair distorted face, laughing and chatting as if he had never had a care on his shoulders. There was Vane Castleton, the worst, as I have told you, of all Tiara's sons; with his low voice, his fair smooth brow, his engaging address, whom nobody would have thought would have hurt a fly, yet whom we called "Butcher," because, in his petty malignity, he had hamstrung a luckless mare of his for not winning a sweepstakes, and had shot dead the brother of a girl whom he had eloped with, and left three weeks after without a shilling to help herself, for trying, poor boy! to revenge his sister. There was De Vigne—yet no! De Vigne's face was no mask, but was the type true enough of his character, and wore the trace of an unquiet fate.

"Halloa, De Vigne," began Tom Severn," "a pretty story this is about you, you sly dog! So this painter of yours we were all called in to admire, a little time ago, is a little concealed Venus, eh?"

De Vigne looked up from helping me to some may naise.

"Explain yourself, Tom; I don't understand you."

"*Won't* understand, you mean. You know you've a little beauty locked up all to yourself at Richmond, and never have told it to your bosom friends. Shockingly shabby of you, De Vigne, to show us that water-colour and let us believe it was done by a young fellow in Poland-street! However, I suppose you don't want any rivals poaching on your manor, and the girl *is* stunning, the blokes say, so we must forgive you."

De Vigne looked supremely disdainful and a little annoyed.

"Pray, my dear Severn, may I ask where you picked up this cock-and-bull story?"

"Oh, yes. Winters, and Egerton, and Steele were making chaff about it in the Army and Navy this morning, saying Hercules had found his Omphale, and they were glad of it, for Dejanira was a devil!"

The blood flushed over De Vigne's white forehead as Severn, in the thoughtlessness of his heart, spoke what *he* meant as good nature; even yet he could not hear unmoved the slightest allusion to the Trefusis, the one disgrace upon his life, the one stain upon his name.

"How *they* heard it I can't tell you," said Severn; "you must ask 'em. Somebody saw the girl looking after you at the gate, I believe. She's a deuced pretty thing—trust you for that, though. But what do you call it a cock-and-bull story for? It's too likely a one for you to deny it with any chance of our believing you, and Heaven knows why you should try. You may hate women now, but everybody knows you never forswore them. We are all shepherds here, as Robin Hood says."

De Vigne was annoyed: in the first place, that this report, which could but be detrimental to her, should, in so brief a time, already have circulated about himself and Alma; in the second, any interference with him or his pursuits or plans always irritated him exceedingly; in the third, he knew that if he ever disabused their minds of his having any connexion with Alma, to know that a pretty woman was living alone and unprotected was for these fellows to ferret her out immediately, to which her *métier* of professional artist would give them the means at once. He was exceedingly annoyed; but he was too wise a man not to know that manifestation of his annoyance would be the surest way to confirm the gossip that had got about concerning them, which for himself, of course, didn't matter two straws.

He laughed slightly. "We are, it is true, Tom; nevertheless, there is a fawn here and there that it is the duty of all of us, Robin Hoods though we be, to spare; don't you know that? I assure you that the gossip you have heard *is* pure gossip, but gossip which annoys me, for this reason, that the lady who is the innocent subject of it is the granddaughter of a late friend of mine, Tressilliar, of Weive Hurst,

whom I met accidently a few weeks ago. Her picture hangs in my room because she wished to have Sabretasche's judgment upon it, as a *dilettante*. Beyond, I have no interest in her, nor she in me, and for the sake of my dear friend, any insult to her name I shall certainly consider as one to my own."

He spoke quietly and carelessly, but his words had weight. De Vigne had never been known to condescend to a lie, not even to a subterfuge or a prevarication, and there was a haughty *noli me tangere* air about him.

"All right, old boy," said Tom. "I didn't know, you see; fellows will talk."

"Of course they will," said De Vigne, eating his marinade leisurely; "and in nine times out of ten they would have been right. I never set up to be a Pharisee, God knows! However, I have no temptation now, for love affairs are no longer to my taste. I leave them to Corydons like Curly."

"But hang it! De Vigne," said Vane Castleton, "Tom's description of this little Trevelyan, Trevanion—what is it?—is so delightful, if you don't care for her yourself, you might let your friends. Introduce us all, do."

"Thank you, Castleton," said De Vigne, drily. "Though you *are* a Duke's son, I must say I don't think you a very desirable addition to a lady's acquaintance."

He cordially detested Castleton, than whom a vainer or more intensely selfish fellow never curled his whiskers nor befooled women, and he had only invited him because he had been arm-in-arm with Severn when De Vigne had asked Tom that morning in Regent Street.

Lord Vane pushed his fine fair curls off his forehead—an habitual trick of his; his brow was very low, and his blond hair, of which he took immense care, was everlastingly falling across his eyes. "Jealous, after all! A trifle of the dog in the manger, eh? with all your philosophy and a—a—what do you call it, chivalry?" he said with a supercilious smile.

I knew De Vigne was growing impatient; his eyes brightened, his mouth grew set, and he pulled his left wristband over his wrist with a jerk. I think that left arm felt an intense longing in its muscles and sinews to "straighten from the shoulder;" with him, as with David, it was a great difficulty to keep the fire from "kindling." But he spoke quietly, very quietly for him; more so than he would have done if no other name than his own had been implicated in it; for

he knew the world too well not to know, also, that to make a woman the subject of a dispute or a brawl is to do her the worst service you can.

"I shall not take your speech as it might be taken, Castleton," he said, gravely, with a haughty smile upon his lips. 'My *friends* accept my word, and understand my meaning; what *you* may think of me or not is really of so little consequence that I do not care to inquire your opinion."

Castleton's eyes scintillated with that cold unpleasant glare with which light eyes sometimes kindle when angry. If he had been an Eton or Rugby boy, one would have called him "sulky;" for a man of rank and fashion the word would have been too small. A scene might have ensued, but Sabretasche—most inimitable tactician—broke the silence with his soft low voice.

"De Vigne, do you know that Harvey Goodwin's steel greys are going for an old song in the Yard? I fancy I shall buy them."

So the conversation was turned, and Alma's name was dropped. Curly, however, half out of *méchanceté*, half because he never heard of a pretty woman without making a point of seeing her, never let De Vigne alone till he had promised to introduce him to her.

"Do, old fellow," urged Curly, "because you know I remember her at Weive Hurst, and she had such deuced lovely eyes then. Do! I promise you to treat her as if she were the richest heiress in the kingdom and hedged round with a perfect abatis of chaperones. I can't say more!"

So De Vigne took him down, being quite sure that if he did not show him the way Curly would find it for himself, and knowing, too, that Curly, though he was a "little wild," as good-natured ladies phrase it, was a true gentleman; and when a man is that, you may trust him, where his honour is touched or his generosity concerned, to break through his outer shell of fashion, ennui or dissipation and "come out strong."

So De Vigne, as I say, took him down one morning, when we had nothing to do, to St. Crucis. It was a queer idea, as conventionalities go, for a young girl to receive our visits without any chaperone to protect her and play propriety but the little lady was one out of a thousand; she could do things that no other woman could, and she welcomed us

with such a mixture of frank and child-like simplicity, with the self-possession, wit, and ease of a woman accustomed to society, that it was very pretty to see her. And we should have known but a very trifle of life if we had not felt how utterly distant from boldness of any kind was our Little Tressillian's charming vivacity and candour—a vivacity that can only come from an unburdened mind, a candour that can only spring from a heart that thinks no ill because it means none. "To the pure all things are pure." True words! Many a spotless rain-drop gleams unsoiled on a filthy and betrodden *trottoir*; many a worm grovels in native mud beneath an unspotted and virgin covering of fairest snow.

It was really pretty to see Alma entertain her callers. She was perfectly natural, because she never thought about herself. She was delighted to see De Vigne, and happy to see us as he had brought us—not quite as flattering a reason for our welcome as Curly and I were accustomed to receive.

"Have you walked every day, Alma, as I told you?" said De Vigne.

"Not every day," said Alma, penitentially. "I will when the summer comes, but the eternal spring upon my canvas is much dearer and more tempting to me than your chill and changeable English spring."

"You are very naughty, then," said De Vigne; "you will be sorry ten years hence for having wasted your health. What is your aim in working eternally like this?"

"To make money to buy my shoes, and my gloves, and my dresses. I have nobody to buy them for me; that is aim practical enough to please you, is it not?"

"But that is not your only one, I fancy?" smiled Curly. "Miss Tressillian scarcely looks like the expounder of prosaic doctrine."

"No; not my only one," answered Alma, quickly, her dark blue eyes lighting up under their silky and upcurled lashes. "They say there is no love more tender than the love of an artist for his work, whether he is author, painter, or musician; and I believe it. For the fruit of your talent you bear a love that no one, save those who feel it can ever attempt to understand. You long to strengthen your wings, to exert your strength, to cultivate your powers, till

you can make them such as must command applause; and when I see a masterpiece, of whatever *genre*, I feel as if I should never rest, till I, too, had laid some worthy offering upon the altar of Art."

Ideal and enthusiastic as the words may seem, coldly considered; as she spoke them, with her eloquent voice and gesticulation, and her whole face beaming with the earnestness of her own belief; we, quickest of all mortals to sneer at "sentiment," but no inclination to ridicule here, but rather a sad regret for the cold winds that we knew would soon break and scatter the warm petals of this bright joyous, Southern flower, and gave a wistful backward glance to the time when we, too, had like thoughts—we, too, like fervour!

De Vigne felt it: but, as his wont was, turned it with a laugh:

"Curly, you need not have started that young lady! In that fertile brain I ought to have warned you there is a powder-magazine of enthusiasm ready to explode at the mere hint of a firebrand, which one ought not to approach within a mile at the least. It will blow itself up some day in its own excessive energy, and get quenched in the world's cold water!"

"Heaven forefend!" cried Curly. "The enthusiasm, which you so irreverently compare to gunpowder, is too rare and too precious not to be taken all the care of that one can. If the ladies of the world had a little of such fire, we, their sons, or lovers, or brothers, might be a trifle less useless, vapid, and wearied."

"Quenched in the world's cold water!" cried Alma, who had been pondering on De Vigne's speech, and had never heard poor Curly's. "It never shall be, Sir Folko. The fire of true enthusiasm is like the fires of Baku, which no water can ever attempt to quench, and which burn steadily on from night to day, and year to year, because their well-spring is eternal."

"Or because the gases are poisonous, and nobody cares to approach them?" asked De Vigne, mischievously.

I noticed that Alma was the first who had brought back in any degree the love of merriment and repartee natural to him in his youth; the first with whom, since his fatal marriage-day, he had ever cordially *laughed*. She called

him Sir Folko, because she persisted in the resemblance between him and her favourite knight which she had discovered in her childhood, and because, as she told him, "Major de Vigne" was so ceremonious. His manner with her, like that to a pretty spoilt child, had established a curiously familiar friendship between them, strangely different from the usual intercourse of men and young girls; for De Vigne received from her the compliments and frankly expressed admiration that come ordinarily from the man to the woman. Somehow or other, it seemed perfectly natural between *them*, and, *après tout*, Eve's

> My author and disposer!—what thou will'st,
> Unargued I obey. God is thy law,
> Thou mine——

is strangely touching, sweet, and natural.

Curly was enchanted with her; he went into tenfold more raptures about her than the beauties of the drawing-room, with their perfect *tournures* and sweeping trains, had ever extorted from him; she was "just his style;" a thing, however, that Curly was perpetually avowing of every different style of blonde and brunette, tall or small, statuesque or kittenish, as they chanced to chase one another in and out of his capacious heart.

"She is a little darling!" he swore earnestly, as we drove homewards, "and certainly the very prettiest woman I have ever seen."

"Rather overdone that, Curly," said de Vigne, drily, "considering all the regular beauties you have worshipped, and that Alma is no regular beauty at all."

"No, she's much better," said Curly, decidedly. "Where's the regular beauty that's worth that little dear's grace, and vivacity, and lovely colouring?"

De Vigne put up his eyebrows, as if he would not give much for the praise of such an universal admirer, as Curly was, of all degrees and orders.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### LE CHAT QUI DORMAIT.

"WHO is that little Tressillian they were talking of at De Vigne's the other night?" Sabretasche asked me one morn-

ing, in the window at White's—his club, *par excellence*, where he was referee and criterion on all things of art, fashion, and society, and where his word could crush a belle, sell a picture, and condemn a coterie.

He shrugged his shoulders as I told him, and stroked his moustaches:

"Very little good will come of *that;* at least for her; for him there will be an amusement for a time, then a certain regret—remorse, perhaps, as he is very generous-hearted—and then a separation, and—oblivion."

"Do you think so? I fancy De Vigne paid too heavy a price for passion to have any fancy to let its reins loose again."

"Mon cher, mon cher!" cried Sabretasche, impatiently, "if Phaeton had not been killed by that thunderbolt, do you suppose that the *bouleversement* and the conflagration would have deterred him from driving his father's chariot as often as Sol would let him have it?"

"Possibly not; but I mean that De Vigne is thoroughly steeled against all female humanity. The sex of the Trefusis cannot possibly, he thinks, have any good in it; and I believe he only takes what notice he does of Alma Tressillian from friendship for her old grandfather and pity for her desolate position."

"Friendship—pity? For Heaven's sake, Arthur, do not you, a man of the world, talk such nonsense. To what, pray do friendship and pity invariably bring men and women? De Vigne and his *protégée* are walking upon mines."

"Which will explode beneath them?"

"*Sans doute.* We are, unhappily, mortal, mon ami! I will go down and see this little Tressillian some day when I have nothing to do. Let me see; she is painting that picture for me, of course, that I ordered of him from his unknown artist. He must take me down: I shall soon see how the land lies between them."

Accordingly, Sabretasche one day, when De Vigne and he were driving down to a dinner at the Castle, took out his watch, and found De Vigne's clocks had been too fast.

"We shall be there half an hour too soon, my dear fellow. Turn aside, and take me to see this little friend of yours with the pretty name and the pretty pictures. If you re-

fuse, I shall think Vane Castleton is right, and that you are like the famed dog in the manger. I have a right to see the artist that is executing my own order."

De Vigne nodded, and turned the horses' heads towards St. Crucis, not with an over-good grace, for he knew Sabretasche's reputation, and the Colonel, with his fascination and his *bonnes fortunes*, was not exactly the man that, whether dog in the manger or not, De Vigne thought a very safe friend for his little Tressillian. But there was no possibility of resisting Sabretasche when he had set his mind upon anything. Very quietly, very gently, but very securely, he kept his hold upon it till he had it yielded up to him.

So De Vigne had to introduce the Colonel, who dropped into an easy chair beside Alma, with his eye-glass up, and began to talk to her. He was a great adept in the art of "bringing out." He had a way of hovering over a woman, and fixing his beautiful eyes on her, and talking softly and pleasantly, so that the subject under his skilful mesmerism developed talent that might otherwise never have gleamed out; and with Alma, who could talk with any and everybody on all subjects under the sun, from metaphysics and ethics to her kitten's collar, and who would discuss philosophies with you as readily as she would chatter nonsense to her parrot, Sabretasche had little difficulty.

De Vigne let the Colonel have all the talk to himself, irritated at the sight of his immovable and inquiring eye-glass, and the sound of his low, *traînante*, musical voice. Now and then, amidst his conversation, the Colonel shot a glance at him, and went on with his criticisms on Art, sacred, legendary, and historic; and on painting in the mediæval and the modern styles, with such a deep knowledge and refined appreciation of his subject as few presidents of the R.A. have ever shown in their lectures.

At last De Vigne rose, impatient past endurance, though he could hardly have told you why.

"It is half-past six, Sabretasche; the turbot and turtle will be cold."

The Colonel smiled:

"Thank you, my dear fellow; there are few things in life more attractive than turtle or turbot. The men will wait; they would be the last to hurry us if they knew our provocation for delay."

De Vigne could have found it in his heart to have kicked the Colonel for that speech, and the soft sweet glance accompanying it. "He will spoil that little thing," he thought, angrily. "No woman's head is strong enough to stand his and Curly's flattery."

"I like your little lady, De Vigne," said Sabretasche, as they drove away. "She is really very charming, good style, and strikingly clever."

"She is not *mine*," said De Vigne, with a haughty stare of surprise.

"Well! she will be, I dare say."

"Indeed, no. I did not suppose your notions of my honour, or rather dishonour, were like Vane Castleton's."

"Nor are they, *cher ami*," said the Colonel, with that grave gentleness which occasionally replaced his worldly wit and gay ordinary tone. "But like him I know the world; and I know, as you would, too, if you thought a moment, that a man of your age cannot have that sort of friendly intercourse with a girl of hers, without its surely ripening into something infinitely warmer and more dangerous. You would be the first to sneer at an attempt at platonics in another; you are the last man in the world to dream of such follies yourself. Tied as you are, you cannot frequent her society without danger for her; and for you, probably remorse—at the least, satiety and regret. With nine men out of ten the result would be a liaison lightly formed and as lightly broken; but you have an uncommon nature, and a young girl like little Tressillian your warmth of heart would never let you desert. I hate advising; I never do it to anybody. My life has left me little title to counsel men against sin and follies which I daily commit myself; nor do I count as sins many things the world condemns as such. Only here I see so plainly what will come of it, that I do not like you to rush into it blindfold and repent afterwards. Because you have had fifty such loves which cost you nothing, that is no reason that the fifty-first may not cost you some pain, some very great pain, in its formation or its severance—"

"You mean very kindly, Sabretasche, but there is no question of 'love' here," interrupted De Vigne, with his impatient hauteur. "In the first place, you, so well read in woman's character, might know she is far too frank and

familiar with me for any fear of the kind. In another I have paid too much for passion ever to risk it again, and I hope I know too well what is due from honour and generosity to win the love of a young unprotected girl while I am by my own folly fettered and cursed by marriage ties. Sins enough I have upon my soul, God knows, but there is no danger of my erring here. I have no temptation; but if I had I should resist it; to take advantage of her innocence and ignorance of my history would be a blackguard's act, to which no madness, even if I felt it, would ever make me condescend to stoop!"

De Vigne spoke with all the sternness and impatience natural to him when roused, spoke in overstrong terms, as men do of a fault they are sure they shall never commit themselves. Sabretasche listened, an unusual angry shadow gathering in his large soft eyes, and a bitter sneer on his features, as he leaned back and folded his arms to silence and *dolce*.

"Most immaculate Pharisee! Remember a divine injunction, 'Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.'"

De Vigne cut his horses impatiently with the whip.

"I am no Pharisee, but I am, with all my faults and vices, a man of honour, I hope."

Sabretasche answered nothing, but annoyance was still in his eyes, and a sneer still on his lips.

De Vigne had one striking fault, namely, that if advised not to do a thing, that thing would he go and do straightway; moreover, being a man of strong will and resolve, and very reliant on his own strength, he was apt, as in his fatal marriage, to go headlong, perfectly safe in his own power to guide himself, to judge for himself, and to draw back when it was needful. Therefore, he paid no attention whatever to Sabretasche's counsels, but, as it chanced, went down to see Alma rather more often than he had done before; for she had said how much she wished she could exhibit at the Water-Colour Society, which De Vigne, knowing something of the president, and of the society in general, had been able to manage for her.

"What should I do without you?" said Alma, fervently, to him one day, when he went there to tell her her picture was accepted. "You are so kind to me, Sir Folko!"

"I? Not at all, my dear child, I wish you would no

exalt me to such a pinnacle. What will you say when I tumble down one day, and you see nothing of me but worthless shivers?"

"Reverence you still," said Alma, softly. "A fragment of the Parthenon is worth a whole spotless and unbroken modern building. If my ideal were to fall, I should treasure the dust."

"But, seriously," he interrupted her, "I wish you would not get into the habit of rating me so high, Alma. I don't in the least come up to it. You do not guess—how should you?—you cannot, even in fancy, picture the life that I, and men like me, lead; you cannot imagine the wild follies with which we drown our past, the reckless pleasures with which we pass our present, our temptations, our weaknesses, our errors; how should you, child as you are, living out of the world in a solitude peopled only with the bright fancies of your own pure imagination, that never incarnates the hideous fauns and beckoning bacchanals which haunt and fever ours?"

"But I can," said Alma, earnestly, looking up to him. "I do not go into the world, it is true, but still I know the world to a certain extent. Montaigne, Rochefoucauld, Rabelais, Goethe, Emerson, Bolingbroke, the translated classics, do you not think they teach me the world, or, at least, of what makes the world, Human Nature, better than the few hours at a dinner-table, or the gossip of morning calls, which you tell me is all girls in good society see of life? You know, Sir Folko, it always seems to me, that woman, fenced in as they are, in educated circles, by boundaries which they cannot overstep, except to their own hindrance; screened from all temptations; deprived of all opportunity to wander, if they wished, out of the beaten track; should be gentle to your sex, whose whole life is one long temptation, and to whose lips is almost forced that Circean 'cup of life' whose flowers round its brim hide the poisons at its dregs. Women have, if they acknowledged them, passions, ambitions, impatience at their own monotonous rôle, longings for the living life denied to them; but everything tends to crush these down in them, has thus tended through so many generations, that it has come to be an accepted thing that they must be calm, fair, pulseless statues; and when here and there a woman dares to acknowledge that

her heart beats, and that nature is not wholly dead within her, the world stares at her, and rails at her, for there is no *bête noire* so terrible to the world as Truth! No, I can fancy your temptations, I can picture your errors and your follies, I can understand how you drink your poison one hour because you liked its flavour, and drink more the next hour to make you forget your weakness in having yielded to it at all. That my own solitude and imagination are only peopled with shapes bright and fair, I must thank Heaven and not myself. If I had been born in squalor and nursed in vice, what would circumstance and surroundings have made me! Oh, I think, instead of the Pharisee's presumptuous 'I thank God that I am holier than he,' our thanksgiving should be, 'I thank God that I have so little opportunity to do evil!' and we should forgive, as we wish to be forgiven ourselves, those whose temptations, either from their own nature or from the outer world, have been so much greater than our own."

Her voice was wonderfully musical, with a strange pathos in it; and her gesticulation had all the grace and fervour of her Southern origin. Her words sent a thrill to De Vigne's heart; they were the first gentle and tolerant words he had heard since his mother had died. He had known but two classes of women; those who shared his errors and pandered to his pleasures, whose life disgusted, while their beauty lured him; and those whose illiberality and whose sermons only roused him to more wayward rebellion against the social laws which they expounded. It touched him singularly to hear words at once so true, so liberal, and so humble, from one on whose young life he knew that no stain had rested; to meet with so much comprehension from a heart, compared with his own, as pure and spotless from all error as the snow-white roses in her windows, on which the morning dewdrops rested without soil. And at her words something of De Vigne's old nature began to wake into new existence, as, after a long and weary sleep, the eyelids tremble before the soul arouses to the heat and action of the day.

A memory of the woman called his wife passed over him —he could scarcely tell why or how—with a cold chill, like the air of a pestilent charnel-house.

"Alma, if women were like you, men might be better

than they are. Child, I wish you would not talk as you do. You wake up thoughts and memories that had far better sleep."

She touched his hand gently:

"Sir Folko, what are those memories?"

He drew his hand away and laughed, not joyously, but that laugh which has less joy in it even than tears:

"Don't you know a proverb, Alma—'*N'éveillez pas le chat qui dort?*"

"But were the cat a tiger I would not fear it, if it were yours."

"But *I* fear it."

There was more meaning in that than Alma guessed. The impetuous passion that had blasted his life, and linked his name with the Trefusis, would be, while his life lasted, a giant whose throes and mighty will would always hold him captive in his chains!

He was silent; he sat looking out of the window by which he sat, and playing with a branch of the white rose. His lips were pressed together, his eyebrows slightly contracted, his eyes troubled, as if he were looking far away—which indeed he was—to a white headstone lying among fragrant violet tufts under the old elms at Vigne, with the spring sunshine, in its fitful lights and shadows, playing fondly round the name of the only woman who had loved him at once fondly and unselfishly.

Alma looked at him long and wistfully, some of his darker shadows flung on her own bright and sunny nature—as the yew-tree throws the dark shadows of its boughs over the golden cowslips that nestle at its roots.

At last she bent forward, lifting her soft frank eyes to his.

"Sir Folko, where are your thoughts? Tell me."

Her voice won its way to his heart; he knew that interest, not curiosity, spoke in it, and he answered gently,

"With my mother."

It was the first time he had spoken of her to Alma—he never breathed her name to any one.

"You loved her dearly?"

"Very dearly."

Alma's eyes filled with tears, a passion very rare with her.

"Tell me of her," she said softly.

"No. I cannot talk of her."

"Because you loved her so much?"

"No. Because I killed her."

This was the great remorse of his life; that his folly had cost him his name and, as he considered, his honour, was less bitter to him than that it had cost his mother's life.

Alma, at his reply—uttered almost involuntarily under his breath—gazed at him, horror-stricken, with wild terror in her large eyes; yet De Vigne might have noticed that she did not shrink from, but rather drew the closer to him. Her expression recalled his thoughts.

"Not that, not that," he said hastily. "My hand never harmed her, but my passions did. My own headlong and wilful folly sent her to her grave. Child! you may well thank God if Temptation never enter your life. No man has strength against it."

For the first time De Vigne felt an inclination to disclose his marriage; to tell her what he would have told to no other living being: of all his own madness had cost him, of the fatal revenge the Trefusis had taken, of the headlong impetuosity which had led him to raise the daughter of a beggar-woman to one of the proudest names in England, of the fatal curse which he had drawn on his own head, and the iron fetters which his own hand had forged. The words were already on his lips, in another minute he would have bent his pride and laid bare his secret to her, if at that moment the door had not opened—to admit Alma's late governess.

Alma was very right—our life hinges upon Opportunity!

De Vigne never again felt a wish to tell her of his marriage.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### PAOLO AND FRANCESCA.

MAY came; it was the height of the season; town was full; Her Majesty had given her first levée; Belgravia and Mayfair were occupied; the Ride and the Ring were full, too, at six o'clock every day, and the thousand toys with

which Babylon amuses her grown babies were ready, among others the Exhibition of Fine Arts, where, on its first day, De Vigne and I went to lounge away an hour, chiefly for the great entertainment and fun afforded to persons of sane mind by the eccentricities of the pre-Raphaelite gentlemen.

In the entrance we met Lady Molyneux and her daughter, Sabretasche and his young Grace of Regalia with them. It was easy to see which the Viscountess favoured the most.

"Are you come to be disenchanted with all living womanhood by the contemplation of Messrs. Millais and Hunt's ideas, Major De Vigne?" asked Violet, giving him her hand, looking a very lovely sample of "living womanhood." Ladies said she was very extravagant in dress. She might be; she was naturally lavish, and liked instinctively all that was graceful in form or colouring; but I only know she dressed perfectly, and, what was better, never *thought about it*.

"Perhaps we should suffer less disappointment if ladies *were* like Millais's ideal," smiled De Vigne. "From those rough, red-haired, long-limbed women we should never look for much perfection; whereas the faces and forms of our living beauties are rather like Belladonna, beautiful to look at, but destruction to approach or trust."

"You are incorrigible!" cried Violet, with a tiny shrug of her shoulders, "and forget that if Belladonna is a poison to those who don't know how to use it, it is a medicine and a balm to those who do."

"But for one cautious enough to cure himself, how many unwary are poisoned for life!" laughed De Vigne.

He said it as a jest, but a bitter memory prompted it.

"Send that fellah to Coventry, Miss Molyneux, do," lisped Regalia; "he's so dweadfully rude."

"Not yet; sarcasms are infinitely more refreshing than empty compliments," said Violet, with a scornful flash of her brilliant eyes. The little Duke was idiot enough to attempt to flatter Violet Molyneux, to whom the *pas* in beauty and talent was indisputably given! "Colonel Sabretasche, take my catalogue, I have not looked into it yet, and mark all our favourites for me. I am going to enjoy the pictures now, and talk to nobody."

A charming ruse on the young lady's part to keep Sabretasche at her side and make him talk to her, for they passed

over eleven pictures, and lingered over a twelfth, while he discoursed on the Italian and French, the German and the English schools.

"Why have you never been to see me for four days?" asked Violet, standing before one of the glorious sea pieces of Stanfield.

Sabretasche hesitated a moment.

"I have had other engagements."

Violet's eyes flashed. "I beg your pardon, Colonel Sabretasche; not being capricious myself, it did not occur to me that you were so. However, if it be a matter of so little moment to you, it is of still less to me."

"Did I not tell you," whispered Sabretasche, "that I like too well to be with you to dare to be with you much. You cannot have forgotten our conversation at Richmond?"

"No," she answered, hurriedly; "but you promised me your friendship, and you have no right to take it away. I do not pretend to understand you, I do not seek to know more than you choose to tell me, but since you once promised to be my friend, you have no right—"

"Violet, for God's sake do not break my heart!" broke in Sabretasche, his voice scarcely above his breath, but full of such intense anguish that she was startled. "Your friend I *cannot* be; anything dearer I *may not* be. Forget me, and all interest in my fate. Of your interest in me I am utterly unworthy; and I would rather that you should credit all the evil that the world attributes to me, and crediting it, learn to hate me, than think that I, in my own utter selfishness, had thrown one shade on your young life, mingled one regret with your bright future."

They were both leaning against the rail; no one saw Violet's face as she answered him.

"To speak of hate from me to you is folly, and it is too late to command forgetfulness. If you had no right to make me remember you, you have still less right to bid me forget you."

"Violet, come and look at this picture of Lance's, Regalia talks of buying it," said her mother's cold, slow, languid voice.

Violet turned, and though she smiled and spoke about the picture in question with some of her old vivacity and self-

possession, her face had lost its brilliant tinting, and her white teeth were set together.

De Vigne joined them at that minute.

"Miss Molyneux, I want to show you a painting in the Middle Room. It is just your style, I fancy. Will you come and look at it?"

We all went into the Middle Room after him, Sabretasche too, pausing occasionally to look at some of the luckless exiles near the ceiling with his lorgnon. By-the-way, what a farce it is to hang pictures where one must have a lorgnon to look at them; the exhibition of the Few is the suppression of the Many!

"Violà!" said De Vigne. "Am I wrong? Don't you like it?"

"Like it!" echoed Violet. "Oh, how beautiful!"

Quite forgetful that she was the centre of a crowd who were looking at her much more than at the paintings on the walls, she stood, the colour back in her cheeks, her eyes lifted to the picture. The painting deserved it. It was Love—old in story, yet new to every human heart—the love of Francesca and Paolo, often essayed by artists, yet never rendered, even by Ary Scheffer, as Dante would have had it, and as it was rendered here.

There were no vulgarities of a fabled Hell; there were the two, alone in that true torture—

Ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria——

yet happy, because *together*. Her face and form were in full light, his in shadow. Heart beating against heart, their arms round each other, they looked down into each other's eyes, On his face were the fierce passions, against which he had had no strength, mingled with deep and yearning regret for the fate he had drawn in with his own. On hers, lifted up to him, was all the love at sight of which he who beheld it "swooned even as unto death;" the love—

——piacer si forte
Che corne vedi ancor non m'abbandona——

the love which made hell, paradise; and torture together, dearer than heaven alone. Her face spoke, her clinging arms circled him as though defying power in eternity strong enough to part them; her eyes looked into his with unutterable

tenderness, anguish for his sorrow, ecstasy in his presence! —and on her soft lips, still trembling with the memory of that first kiss which had been their ruin, was all the heroism and all the passion, all the fidelity, devotion, and joy in him alone, spoken in that one sentence—

Questi che mai da me non fia diviso!

The picture told its tale; crowds gathered round it; and those who could not wholly appreciate its wonderful colouring and skill were awed by its living humanity, its passionate tenderness, its exquisite beauty.

Violet stood, regardless of the men and women around her, looking up at the Francesca, a fervent response to it, a yearning sympathy with the warm human love and joys of which it breathed, written on her mobile features.

She turned away from it with a heavy sigh, and the flush deepened in her cheeks as she met Sabretasche's eyes who now stood behind her.

"You are pleased with that picture," he said, bending his head.

"Is it not beautiful?" cried Violet, passionately. "It is not to be criticised; it is to be loved. It is art and poetry and human nature blended in one. Whoever painted it interprets art as no other artist here can do. He has loved and felt his subject, and makes others in the force of his genius feel and love it too. Listen how every one is praising it! They all admire it, yet not nine out of ten of these people can understand it. Tell me who painted it, quick! Oh! give me the catalogue!'

She took it out of his hands with that rapid vivacity which worried her mother so dreadfully as bad ton, and turned the leaves over till she reached "226. Paolo and Francesca—Vivian Sabretasche.

'Amor che a nullo amato amar perdona,
Mi prese del costui piacer si forte,
Che come vedi ancor non m'abbandona
Amor condusse noi ad una morte.'"

She dropped the book; she could not speak, but she held out her hand to him, and Sabretasche took it for an instant as they leaned over the rail together in the security and solitude of a crowd."

"Do not speak of it here," he whispered, as he bent down for the fallen catalogue.

"'Pon my honour, Sabretasche," whispered little Regalia, "we're all so astonished—turning artist, eh? Never knew you exhibited. Splendid picture—ah—really!"

"You do me much honour," said Sabretasche, coldly—he hated the little puppy who was always dawdling after Violet —"but I should prefer not to be congratulated before a room full of people."

"On my life, old fellow, I envy you," said De Vigne, too low for anyone to hear him; "not for being the talk of the room, for that is neither to your taste nor mine, but for having such magnificent talent as you have given us here."

"Cui bono?" said Sabretasche, with his slight smile, that was too gentle for discontent, and too sad for cynicism.

"I had not an idea *whose* Francesca I was bringing Miss Molyneux to see," De Vigne continued. "How came you to exhibit this year?"

"Oh, I have been a dabbler in art a long time," laughed the Colonel. "Many of the Forty are my intimate friends; they would not have rejected anything I sent."

"They would have been mad to reject the Francesca; they have nothing to compete with it on the walls. I wish you were in Poland-street, Sabretasche, that one could order of you. You are the first fine gentleman, since Sir George Beaumont, who has turned 'artiste véritable,' and you grace it better than he."

Sabretasche and his Grace of Regalia, De Vigne, and I, went to luncheon that day with Lady Molyneux in Loundes-square, at which meal the Colonel made himself so charming, lively, and winning, that the Viscountess, strong as were her leanings to her pet Duke, could not but admit that he shone to very small advantage, and made a mental mem. never to invite the two together again. The Molyneux were devoting that morning to picture-viewing. And from the Royal Academy, after luncheon, they went to the French aquarelles, in Pall Mall, and thence to the Water-Colour Exhibition, whither De Vigne and I followed them in his tilbury.

"I wonder what they will say to Alma's picture," said De Vigne, as we alighted. "I wish it may make a hit, as it is her livelihood now, poor child!"

Strange enough, it was before Alma's picture that we

found most people in the room congregated; and Violet turned to us:

"Come and look here, Major De Vigne; this 'Louis Dix-sept in the Tower of the Temple,' by Miss Trevelyan—Trevanion—no, Tressillian—whoever she be—is the gem of the collection to my mind. There is an unlucky green ticket on it, else I would purchase it. What enviable talent! I wish I were Miss Tressillian!"

"How rash you are!" said De Vigne. "How can you tell but that Miss Tressillian may be some masculine woman living in an *entresol*, painting with a clay pipe between her teeth, and horses and cows for veritable models in a litter adjoining, dressing like George Sand, and deriving inspiration from gin?"

"What a shameful picture!" cried Violet, indignantly. "I do not know her, nor anything about her, it is true, but I am perfectly certain that the woman who idealised and carried out this painting, with so much delicacy and grace, must have a delicate and graceful mind herself."

"Or," continued De Vigne, ruthlessly, "she may now, for anything you can tell, be a *vieille fille* who has consecrated her life to art, and grown old and ugly in the consecration, and who—"

"Be quiet, Major De Vigne," interrupted Violet. "I am perfectly certain that the artist would correspond to the picture: Raphael was as beautiful as his paintings, Michael Angelo was of noble appearance, Mozart and Mendelssohn had faces full of music—"

"Fuseli, too, was," said De Vigne, mischievously, "remarkably like his grand archangels; Reynolds, in his brown coat and wig, is so poetic that one could have no other ideal of the 'Golden Age;' Turner's appearance was so artistic that one would have imagined him a farmer bent on crops; fat and snuffy Handel is the embodiment of the beauty of the Cangio d'Aspetto—"

"How tiresome you are!" interrupted Violet again. "I am establishing a theory; I don't care for facts—no theorists ever do in these days! I maintain that a graceful and ennobling art must leave its trace on the thought and mind and manners of its expositors (I know you are going to remind me of Morland at the hedge-alehouse, of Opie, and the 'little Jew-broker,' and of Nollikens making the

writing-paper label for the single bottle of claret); never mind, I keep to my theory, and I am sure that this Miss Tressillian, who has had the happiness to paint the lovely face of that little Dauphin, would, if we could see her, correspond to it; and I envy her without the slightest hesitation."

"You have no need to envy any one," whispered Regalia.

Violet turned impatiently from him, and began to talk to Sabretasche about one of those ever-charming pictures of Mr. Edmund Warren. De Vigne looked at me and smiled, thinking with how much more grounds the little Tressillian had envied Violet Molyneux.

"I wish I could tell you half I feel about your Francesca," said Violet, lifting her eyes to Sabretasche's face, as they stood a part from anybody else in a part of the room little frequented, for there were few people there that morning, and those few were round Alma's pet picture. "You can never guess how I reverence your genius, how it speaks to my heart, how it reveals to me all your inner nature, which the world, much as it admires you, never sees or dreams of seeing."

Sabretasche bent his head; her words went too near home to him to let him answer them.

"All your pictures," Violet went on, "bear the stamp of a masters's talent, but this—how beautiful it is! I might have known no other hand but yours could have called it into life. Have you long finished it?"

"I finished the painting two years ago; but three *months* ago I saw for the first time the face that answered my ideal, the face that expressed all that I would have expressed in Francesca. I effaced what I had painted, and in its stead I placed—yours."

Violet's eyes dropped; the delicate colour in her cheeks deepened. She had been dimly conscious of a resemblance in the painting, and De Vigne's glance from Francesca to herself had told her that he at the least saw it also; and, indeed, the face of the painting, with its delicate and impassioned features, and the form, with its voluptuous grace, were singularly like her own.

Sabretasche looked closer at her.

"You could love like Francesca," he said involuntarily.

It was not above his breath, but his face gave it all the eloquence it lacked, as hers all the response it needed.

She heard his short quick breathing as he stood beside her; she felt the passionate words which rose to his lips: she knew that if ever a man's love was hers his was then. But he was long silent, and when he spoke his voice was full of that utter anguish which had startled her twice before.

"*Keep* it, then, and give it to some man more worthy of it than I!"

"Violet my love, are you not tired of all this?" said Lady Molyneux, sweeping up. "It is half-past four, and I want to go to Swan and Edgar's. Pictures make one's head ache so; I was never so ill in my life as I was after the Sistine chapel."

Sabretasche took her to their carriage without another word between them.

The next day to our surprise, the Colonel asked for leave, got, it, and went away.

"What the deuce is that for, Colonel?" said I. "Never been out of town in the season before, have you?"

"Just the reason why I should be now, my dear fellow," responded Sabretasche, lazily. "Twenty years of the same thing is enough to tire one of it, if the thing were paradise itself; and when it comes to be only dusty pavés, whitebait dinners, and club gossip, ennui is very pardonable. The medical men tell me, if I don't give up Pleasure for a little time, Pleasure will give up Me. You know I am not overstrong; so I shall go to the Continent, and look at it in spring, before there are the pests of English touring about, with Murrays, carpet-bags, and sandwiches."

He vouchsafed no more on the subject, but went. His departure was talked of in clubs and boudoirs; women missed him as they would have missed no other man in London, for Sabretasche was universal censor, referee, regulator of fashion, his bow was the best thing in the Park, his fêtes at Richmond the most charming and exclusive of the season; but people absent on tours are soon forgotten, like dead leaves sucked under a water-wheel and whirled away; and after the first day, perhaps, nobody saved De Vigne and I remarked how triste his house in Park-lane looked with the green persiennes closed over its sunny bay-windows.

Whatever his motive, the Colonel was gone to that golden land where the foamy Rhône speeds on her course, and Mar-

seilles lies by the free blue sea, and the Pic du Midi rears its stately head. The Colonel was gone, and all the clubs, and drawing-rooms, and journals were speaking of his Francesca; speaking for once, unanimously, in admiration for its wonderful union of art and truth. The Francesca was the theme of the day in artistic circles; its masterly conception and unexceptionable handling would for any pencil have gained it fame; and in fashionable circles it only needed the well-known name of Vivian Sabretasche to give it at once an interest and a brevet of value. The Francesca was talked of by everybody, and, strangely enough, the picture most appreciated in another line by the papers and the virtuosi was the Little Tressillian's, which, with its subject, its treatment, and the truthful rendering of the boy's face, attracted more attention than any woman's picture had done for a long time; the art reviews were almost unanimous in its praise; certain faults were pointed out—reviewers must always find *some* as a sort of voucher of their own discernment—but, for all that, Alma's first picture was a very decided success.

Not long after the Exhibition, De Vigne, one morning after early parade, ordered his horse round, put some of the journals in his coat-pocket, and rode towards Richmond, with the double purpose of having a cool morning gallop before the bother of the day commenced, and of seeing Alma, which he had not done since the success of her picture. He rode fast;—I believe it would have been as great a misery to him to be obliged to do a thing slowly as it would have been to Sabretasche to do it quickly!—and he enjoyed the fresh morning, with the free, pure air of spring. His nature was naturally a very happy one; his character was too strong, vigorous, and impatient to allow melancholy to become habitual to him; he was too young for his fate, however it preyed upon his pride, to be constantly before him; his wife was, indeed, a bitter memory to him, but she was *but* a memory to him now, and a man imperceptibly forgets what is never recalled to him. Except occasional deep fits of gloom and an unvarying cynical sarcasm, De Vigne had cured himself of the utter despondency into which his marriage had first thrown him; the pace at which he lived, if the pleasures were stale, was such as does not leave a man much time for thought, and now, as he rode

along, some of his natural spirits came back to him as they generally do in the saddle to a man fond of riding.

"At home of course?" he said to Mrs. Lee, as she opened the door to him—said it with that careless hauteur which was the result of habit, not of intention. De Vigne was very republican in his theories, but the patrician came out in him malgré lui!

"Yes, sir," said the old nurse, giving him her lowest curtsey. "Yes, sir, she's at home, and there's a young gentleman a-calling on her. I'm am glad of it; she wants somebody to talk to bad enough. 'Tain't right, you know, sir, for a merry child like that to be cooped up alone; you might as well put a bird in a cage and tie its beak up, so that it couldn't sing! It's that young gentleman as came with you, sir, the other day."

De Vigne stroked his moustaches.

"Oh, oh! Master Curly's found his way, has he? I dare say she'll be a confounded little flirt, like all the rest of them, when she has the opportunity," was his reflection, more natural than complimentary, as he opened the door of Alma's room, where the little lady was sitting, as usual, in the window, among the birds and flowers De Vigne had sent her; Curly, lying back in the chaise longue, talking to her quite as softly and far more interestedly than he was wont to talk to the beauties in his mother's drawing-room.

But Alma cut him short in the middle of a sentence as she turned her head at the opening of the door, and sprang up at the sight of De Vigne.

"How glad I am! How good you are to come so early!"

"Not good at all; the air is beautiful to-day, one only wants to be fishing in a mountain burn to enjoy it thoroughly. Hallo, Curly!" said De Vigne throwing himself into an arm-chair; "how are you? How did *you* manage to get up so early? I thought you never were up till after one, except on Derby Day?"

"Or other temptation greater still," said Curly with an eloquent glance of his long, violet eyes at Alma.

"Do you mean that for a compliment to me?" said the Little Tressillian, with that gay, rebellious air which was so pretty in her. "In the first place, I do not believe it, for there is no woman on the face of the earth who could attempt to rival a horse; and in the second, I should not

thank you for it if I did, for compliments are only fit for empty heads to feed on."

"Meaning, you think yours the very reverse of empty?" said De Vigne, quietly.

"Certainly. I am not a boarding-school girl, monsieur," said Alma, indignantly. "I have filled it with what food I can get for it, and I know at least enough to feel that I know nothing—the first step to wisdom the sages say."

"But if you dislike compliments you might at least accept homage," said Curly, smiling.

"Homage? Oh! yes, as much as you like. I should like to be worshipped by the world, and petted by a few."

"I dare say you would," said De Vigne. "I can't say your desires are characterised by great modesty!"

"Well, I speak the truth," said Alma, naïvely. "I *should* like to be admired by the thousands, and loved just by one or two."

"You have only to be seen to have your first wish," said Curly, softly, "and only to be known to have much more than your second."

Alma turned away impatiently; she had a sad knack of showing when she was annoyed.

"Really you are intolerable, Colonel Brandling. You spoil conversation utterly. I say those things because I mean them, not to make you flatter me. I shall talk only to Sir Folko, for he understands me, and answers me properly."

With which lecture to Curly she twisted her low chair nearer to De Vigne, and looked up in his face, much as spaniels look up in their master's, liking a kick from them better than a caress from a stranger.

"Have you seen Miss Molyneux lately?"

"Yes; and not long ago I heard Miss Molyneux envying you!"

"Me! I envy *her*, if you like. How does she know me! What has she heard about me? Who has told her anything of me?"

"Gently, gently, *de grâce*! I don't know that she has heard anything of you, or that anybody has told her anything about you; but she has seen something of yours, and admired it exceedingly."

"Ah! my picture!" cried Alma, joyously, her envy and

her wrongs passing away like summer shadows off a sunny landscape. "What has been said about it? Who has seen it? Do the papers mention it? Have the—"

"One question at a time, please, then perhaps I may contrive to answer them," said De Vigne, smiling; "though the best answer to them all will be for you to read these. Here, see how you like that!"

He took a critique by a well-known Art-critic out of his pocket, and gave it to her, pointing out, among many condemnatory notices of other works, the brief words in praise of her own, worth more than whole pages of warmer laudation but less discriminating criticism, which Alma read with her eyes beaming, and her whole face in a rose flush of delight.

"Wait a minute; reserve your raptures," said De Vigne, putting the 'Times' and other papers before her. "If the first review sends you into such a state of exultation, we shall lose sight of you altogether over these."

"Ah, they make me so happy!" she cried, with none of the dignity and tranquil pride becoming to a successful artist, but with a wild, gleeful triumph amusing to behold. "I used to think my pictures would be liked if people saw them; but I never hoped they would be admired like this; and it is all owing to you; without you I should never have had it!"

"Indeed you would, though. You have nothing to thank me for, I can assure you."

"I have! You knew how I could exhibit it; you did it all for me; but *for* you my picture would now be hanging here, unnoticed and unpraised; and you know well enough that your few words are of more value to me than all these!" With which Alma tossed over the table, with contemptuous energy, the reviews which had charmed her a minute or two before.

"Very unwise," said De Vigne, drily. "These will make your fame and your money; my words can do you no good whatever."

She twisted herself away from him with one of her rapid, un-English movements.

"How courteous he is! You are very forbearing, Miss Tressillian, to put up with him!" said Curly, who had been listening, half amusedly, half irritably, to this conversation, which excluded him.

Alma was angry with De Vigne herself, but she was not going to let any one else be so too.

"Forbearing? What do you mean? I should be very ungrateful if I were not thankful for such a friend."

"Now that is too bad," said Curly, plaintively. "I, who really admire your most marvellous talent, only get tabooed for being a flatterer, while he is thought perfection, and pleases by being most abominably rude."

"You had better not measure yourself with him, Colonel Brandling," said Alma, with that mischievous impudence which sat well upon her, though no other woman, I believe, could have had it with such impunity.

"Vous me piquez, mademoiselle," said Curly. "You will tempt me by your very prohibition to enter the lists with him. I should not care to dispute the belt with him in most things, but for such a prize—"

"What nonsense are you talking, Curly?" said De Vigne, with that certain chill hauteur now so customary to him, but which Alma had never yet seen in him. "A prize to be fought for must be disputed. Don't bring hot-pressed compliments here to spoil the atmosphere."

"That's right, take my part," interrupted Alma, not understanding his speech as Curly understood it. "You see, Colonel Brandling, that sort of high-flown flattery is no compliment; if the man meant it, it says little for his intellect, for we are none of us angels without wings, as you call us; and if he do not mean it, it says little for ours, for it is easy to tell when any one is really liking or only laughing at us."

"Indeed!" said Curly. "I wish we were as clear when ladies were liking or laughing at us; it would save us a good many disappointments, when enchanting forms of life and light, who have softly murmured tenderest words when they stole our hearts away in tulle illusion at a hunt ball, bow to us as chillily as to a first introduction when we meet them afterwards en Amazone in the Ride, with somebody as rich as he is gouty on their off-side."

"Serve you right for being so credulous," said De Vigne. "Women are either actresses or fools; if they are amiable they are stupid, and if they are clever they are artful."

"Like Thackeray's heroines," suggested Curly.

"Exactly; shows how well the man knows life The

first thing the world teaches a clever woman is to banish her heart. Women may thrive on talent, they are certain to go to rack and ruin on feeling."

"I don't agree with you," said Alma, looking up, ready for a combat.

"Don't you, *petite*?" laughed De Vigne, "I think you will when you have a few more years over your head, and have seen the world a little."

"No, I do not," returned the Little Tressillian, decidedly, "I believe that in proportion as you feel so do you suffer; but I deny that all clever women are actresses. Where will you go for all your noblest actions but to women of intellect and mind? Sappho's heart inspired the genius which has come down to us through such lengthened ages. Was it not love and genius in one, which immortalised Héloïse? Was it not intellect, joined to their love for their country, which have placed the deeds of Polycrita, Hortensia, Hersillia, Mademoiselle de la Rochefoucauld, among the records of patriotism? One of the truest affections we have heard of was that of Vittoria Colonna for Pescara, of the woman who ranks only second to Petrarch, the friend of Pope, and Bembo, and Catarini, the adored of Michael Angelo, the admired of Ariosto! Oh, you are very wrong; where you find the glowing imagination, there, too will you find as ardent affections; were there is expansive intellect, there, and there only, will be charity, tolerance, clear perception, just discrimination; with a large brain, a large heart, the more cultured the intelligence, the more sensitive the susceptibilities! Lucy Edgermond would make your tea for you tolerably, and head your table respectably, and blush where she ought, and say Yes and No like a well-bred woman: but in Corinne alone will you find passion to beat with your own, intellect to match with your own, sympathy, comprehension, elevation, all that a woman *should* give to the man she loves!"

A Corinne in her own way I can fancy she looked, too, her blue eyes scintillating like stars in her earnestness, and her voice rising and falling in impassioned vehemence, accompanied with her vivacious and unconscious gesticulation, a trick, probably, of her foreign blood. Curly listened to her with amazement, this was something quite new to him; it was not so new to De Vigne, but it touched him with

something deeper, more like regret than amusement. A glimpse of the golden land is pain when we know the door is locked, and the key irrevocably lost.

"Do you suppose, *petite*," he said with a bitter smile, "that if there *were* Corinnes in the land men would be such fools as to go and take the Lucies of modern society in their stead? Heaven knows, if there were women such as you describe, we might be better men; more earnest in our lives, more faithful in our loves! But you draw from the ideal, I from the real, two altitudes very far wide apart; as far apart, my child, as dawn and midnight."

His tone checked and saddened Alma's bright and enthusiastic nature. She gave a heavy sigh.

"It is midnight with you, I am afraid, and I so want it to be noon!"

He answered with a laugh.

"If it be, it is like midnight at a *bal d'Opéra*, with plenty of gaslights, transparencies, music, and amusement enough to send the sun jealous, and making believe the day has dawned!"

"But don't the gaslights, and transparencies, and all the rest of your *bal d'Opéra* look tawdry and garish when the day is really up and on them?"

"We never let the daylight in," laughed De Vigne; "and won't remember that we ever had any brighter light than our coloured lamps. Why should we? They do well enough for all intents and purposes."

Alma shook her head:

"They won't content you always."

"Oh yes, they will; I have no desires now but to live without worry, and die in some good hard fight in harness, like my father. What! are you going, Curly? I'll come with you."

"Yes, I must," said Curly. "I'm going to a confounded déjeûner in Palace Gardens, at that little flirt's, Jerry Maberly. I shall barely get back in time. How time slips in some places. If I promise to leave compliments, *i. e.* in your case, truth, behind me, may I not come again? Pray be merciful, and allow me."

"How can I prevent you?" said Alma, in a laughing unconsciousness of Curly's meaning. "Certainly, come if you like; it is kind of you, for I am very dull here alone.

I am no philosopher, and cannot make a virtue of necessity, and pretend to take my tub and cabbage-leaves in preference to a causeuse and delicate mayonnaise."

"Capricious, like all your sex. You are asking for compliments now, Alma. '*On ne loue d'ordinaire que pour être loué*,'" said De Vigne, drily.

"Am I? I did not mean it so," answered the girl, innocently.

"Nor did I take it so," said Curly, bending towards her as he took her hand; so I shall not say how I thank you for your permission, but only avail myself of it as often as I can."

De Vigne stood looking disdainfully on, stroking his moustaches; and thinking, I dare say, what arrant flirts all women were at heart, and what fools men were to pander to their vanities.

He bid her good morning with that careless hauteur which he had often with everybody else, but very rarely with her. While he stood at the door waiting for his groom, he heard Alma's voice:

"Come back a minute."

He went back, as in courtesy bound.

"Why did you speak so crossly to me?"

"I! I was not aware of it."

"But I was, and it was not kind of you, Sir Folko."

"Why will you persist in calling me like that knight *sans peur et sans reproche?*" said De Vigne, impatiently. "I tell you I have nothing in common with him—with his pure life and his spotless shield. He did no evil; I do—Heaven knows how much! He surmounted his temptations; I have always succumbed to mine. He had a conscience at ease; mine might be as great a torture as the rack. His past was one of wise thoughts and noble deeds; mine can show neither the one nor the other."

"Of your life you know best; but in your character I choose to see the resemblance," replied Alma, always resolute to her own opinion. "Was he not a man who feared nothing, who was fierce to his foes and generous to those who trusted him? As for his past, he had probably drawn experience from error, as men ever do; and learnt wisdom out of folly. And as for his stainless shield, is not your haughty De Vigne honour as unsullied as when it passed to you?"

"*No*," said De Vigne, fiercely. "My folly stained it, and the stain is the curse of my life. Child, why will you speak of such things? If you care for my friendship, you must never allude to my past."

Deadly memories were stirring in him. Most women might have been afraid of him in his haughty anger. She was not. She looked up at him, bewildered, it is true, but with a strange mingling of girlish tenderness and woman's passion, both unconscious of themselves.

"Oh, I will not! Do forgive me!"

"Yes, yes, I forgive you," said De Vigne, hastily. "Don't exalt me into a god, Alma, that's all; for I am *very* mortal."

He laid his hand on her shoulder, with the familiar kindness he had grown into with her.

In another second he was across his horse's back, and riding out of the court-yard with Curly, while she stood in the doorway looking after him, shading her eyes from the May sun, which touched up her golden hair and her bright-hued dress into a brilliant tableau, under the low, dark porch of her home.

Curly rode on quietly for some little way, busying his mind with rolling the leaves round a Manilla, and lighting it en route, while De Vigne puffed away at a giant Havannah, between regulating which and keeping his fidgety Grey Derby quiet (he usually rode horses that would have thrown any other man but him or M. Rarey), he had little leisure for roadside conversation.

At last Curly broke silence, flicking his mare's ears thoughtfully.

"Well, De Vigne! I don't know what to make of it!"

"Don't know what to make of what?" demanded De Vigne, curtly.

He was a little impatient with his Frestonhills pet. One may not care two straws for pheasant-shooting—nay, one may even have sprained one's arm, so that it is a physical impossibility to lift an Enfield to one's shoulder—and yet, so dog-in-mangerish is human nature, that one could kick a fellow who ventures to come in and touch a head of our *défendu* or uncared-for game!

"Of that little thing," returned Curly musingly. "I don't understand her."

"Very possibly!"

"Why very possibly? I know a good deal of women, good, bad, and indifferent, but I'll be hanged if I can understand that little Tressillian. She is so frank and free one *might* take no end of advantage of her; and yet, somehow, deuce take it, one *can't*. The girl's truth and fearlessness are more protection to her than other women's pruderies and chevaux-de-frise."

De Vigne did not answer, but smoked silently.

"She is a little darling," resumed Curly, meditatively. "One feels a better fellow with her—eh?"

"Can't say," replied De Vigne. "I have generally looked on young ladies, for inflammable boys like you, as dangerous stimulants rather than as calming tonics."

"Confound your matter of fact," swore Curly. "You may laugh at it if you like, but I mean it. She makes me think of things that one pooh-poohs and forgets in the bustle of the world. She's a vast lot too good to be shut up in that brown old house, with only a kitten to play with, and an old nurse to take care of her."

"She seems to have made an impression on you!"

"Certainly she has!" said Curly, gaily. "And, 'pon my life, what makes still more impression on me, De Vigne, is that you and I should be going calling on and chatting with her as harmlessly as if she were our sister, when we *ought* to be making desperate love to her, if she hadn't such confounded trusting eyes of hers that they make one ashamed of one's own thoughts! 'Pon my life, it's very extraordinary!"

"If extraordinary, it is only honour," said De Vigne, with his coldest hauteur, "towards a young, guileless girl, utterly unprotected, save by her own defencelessness. For my own part, as a 'married man' (how cold his sneer grew at those words!), I have no right to 'enter the lists' with you, as you poetically phrased it to-day; and for yourself, you are too true a gentleman, Curly, though it is 'our way' to be unscrupulous in such matters, to take unfair advantage of my introduction. Indeed, if you did, I, to whom Mr. Tressillian appealed for what slight assistance I have it in my power to afford her, should hold myself responsible for having made you known to her, and should be bound to take the insult as to myself."

Curly, at the beginning of De Vigne's very calm, but very grandiose speech, opened his lazy violet eyes, and stared at him; but as he went on, he turned to his old Frestonhills hero with his smile,—so *young* in its brightness:

"Quite right, De Vigne. You are a brick! and if I do any harm to that dear little Tressillian, I give you free leave to shoot me dead like a dog, and I should richly deserve it too. But go and see her I must, for she is worth all the women we shall meet at Jerry's to-day, though they *do* count themselves the *crême de la crême*."

"The *crême de la crême* can be, at the best, only skim!" said De Vigne, with his ready fling of sarcasm; "but I am not going to the Maberlys, thank you. Early strawberries and late *on dits* are both flavourless to my taste; the fault of my own palate perhaps. I shall go and lunch at the U.S., and play a game or two at pool. How pleasant the wind is! Grey Derby wants a gallop."

Palamon and Arcite were not truer or warmer friends than De Vigne and Curly; but, when a woman's face dazzled the eyes of both, the death-blow was struck to friendship, and the seeds of feud were sown.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE SKELETON WHICH SOCIETY HAD NEVER SEEN.

On the 12th of May Leila Countess of Puffdoff gave a ball, concert, and sort of moonlight fête, all three in one, at her charming dower-house at Twickenham. All our set went, and all of Ours, for *le feu* Puffdoff had been in the Dashers, and out of a tender memory of him, his young widow made pets of all the Corps; not, one is sure, because we were counted the handsomest set of men in all Arms, but out of pure love and respect for our late gouty Colonel, who, Georges Dandin in life, became a Mausolus when under the sod. Who upholds that the good is oft interred with our bones? 'Tisn't true though it *is* Shakspeare who says it; if you leave your family or your pet hospital a good many thousands, you will get the cardinal virtues, and

a trifle more, in letters of gold on your tomb; though if you have lived up to your income, or forgotten to insure, any penny-a-lining La Monnoye will do to scribble your epitaph, and break off with "*C'est trop mentir pour cinq écus!*" Le feu Puffdoff became "my poor dear lord,' as soon as the grave closed over him; pour cause—"my poor dear ord" had left his Countess most admirably well off, and with some of this "last bequest" the little widow gave us a charming fête on this 12th of May.

I went to the ball late; De Vigne chose instead to go to a card party at Wyndham's, where play was certain to be high. He preferred men's society to women's at all times, and I must say I think he showed his judgment! The first person I saw was Violet, on Curly's arm, with whom she had been waltzing. Brilliant and lovely she looked, with all her high-bred grace and finish about her; but she had lost her colour, there was an absence of all that free spontaneous gaiety, and there was a certain distraction in her eyes, which made me guess the Colonel's abrupt departure had not been without its effect upon our most radiant beauty. She had promised me the sixth dance the previous day in the Park, and as I waltzed with her, pour m'amuser, I mentioned Sabretasche's name casually, when, despite all her sang-froid, a slight flush in her cheeks showed she did not hear it with indifference. When I resigned her to Regalia, I strolled through the rooms with the other beauté régnante of the night, Madame la Duchesse de La Vieillecour. Good Heavens! what relationship was there between that stately, haughty-eyed woman, with her Court atmosphere about her calm but finished coquetteries, and bright-faced, blithe-voiced Gwen Brandling, who had given me that ring under the trees in Kensington Gardens ten years before? Ah, well! Time changes us all. The ring was old-fashioned now; and Madame and I *made love* more amusingly and more wisely, if less truly than earnestly, than in those old silly days when we were *in love*, before I had learned experience and she had taken up prudence and ducal quarterings!

I was sitting under one of the luxuriant festoons of creepers in the winter garden with her Excellency; revenging, perhaps, a little more naturally than rightly, on Madame de La Vieillecour the desertion of Gwen Brandling; and I

suppose I was getting a trifle too sarcastic in the memories I was recalling to her, for she broke off our conversation suddenly, and not with that subtle tact which Tuileries air had taught her.

"Look! Is it possible! Is not that Colonel Sabretasche? I thought he was gone to Biarritz for his health?"

I looked; it *was* Sabretasche, to my supreme astonishment, for his leave had not nearly expired; and in a letter De Vigne had had from him a day or two previous, there had been no mention of his intending to return.

"How charming he is, your Colonel!" said Madame de La Vieillecour languidly. "I never met anybody handsomer or more witty in all Paris. Bring him here, I want to speak to him."

"Surprised to see me, Arthur?" said Sabretasche, laughing, as I went up to him, obedient to her desires. "I always told you never to be astonished at anything I do. Madame de La Vieillecour there? She does me much honour. Is she trying to make you singe your wings again?"

He came up to her with me, of course, and stood chatting some minutes.

"I am only this moment arrived," he said, in answer to her. "When I reached Park-lane this evening, I found Lady Puffdoff's card; so I dined, dressed, and came off, for I knew I should meet all my old friends here. Yes, I am much better, thank you; the sweet air of the Pyrenees must always do one good, and then they give all the credit to the Biarritz baths! Shockingly unjust, but what *is* just in this world?"

He stayed chatting some moments, though his eyes glanced impatiently through the rooms. The air of the Pyrenees had indeed done him good; his listless melancholy, which had grown on him so much during the last month, had entirely worn off; there was a clear mind-at-ease look about him as if he were relieved of some weight that had worn him down, and there was a true ring about his voice and laugh which had not been there, gay as he was accounted, since I had known him, even when he was ten years younger than he was now. He soon left Madame de La Vieillecour, and lounged through the rooms, exchanging a smile, or a bow, or a few words with almost

every one he met, for Sabretasche had a most illimitable acquaintance.

Violet Molyneux was sitting down after her waltz with Regalia, leaning back on a couch, fanning herself slowly, and attending very little to the crowd of men who had gathered, as they were certain to do, round the beauty of the season. She generally laughed, and talked, and jested, with them all, so that her pet friends called her a shocking flirt, but to-night she was listless and silent, playing absently with her bouquet, though admiring glances enough were bent upon her, and delicate flattery enough breathed in her ears, to have roused the Sleeping Beauty herself from her trance.

It required more, however, to rouse her; that little more she had, in a voice well accustomed to give meaning to such words, which whispered:

"How can I hope I have been remembered when you have so many to teach you to forget?"

She looked up; her wild-rose colour came back into her cheeks; she gave him her hand without a word, and one of her vassals, a young Viscount, in the Rifles, relinquished his place beside her to Sabretasche. Then she talked to him, quietly enough, on indifferent subjects, as if neither remembered their last strange interview in the Water-colour Exhibition, as if the Francesca were not in both their minds, as if love were not lying at the heart and gleaming in the eyes of each of them!

Sabretasche asked her to waltz; she could not, since she had only the minute before refused Regalia; but she took his arm and strolled into the winter-garden, leaving the full rise and swell of the ball-room music with the subdued hum and murmur of the Society in the distance.

He spoke of trifles as they passed the different groups that were laughing, chatting, or flirting in the several rooms; but his eyes were on hers, and spoke a more eloquent language. Violet never asked him of his sudden return or his abrupt departure. She was too happy to be with him again to care through what right or reason she was so. Gradually they grew silent, as they strolled on through the conservatories till they were alone. One side of the winter-garden was open to the still night, where the midnight stars shone on trees and statues, with lamps

gleaming between, while the nightingales sang their chants of love, which give utterance in their unknown tongue to those diviner thoughts, that yearning sadness, which lie far down unseen in Human nature.

The night was still, there was no sound save the distant music and the sweet gush of the nightingales' songs close by; the wind swept gently in till the air was full of the dreamy and voluptuous fragrance which lulls the senses and woos the heart to those softer moments which, could they but last, would make men never need to dream of heaven. Such hours are rare; what wonder if, to win them, we risk all, if in them we cry with the Lotus Eaters,

> "Let us alone. What is it that will last?
> All things are taken from us and become
> Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
> Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
> To war with evil? Is there any peace
> In ever climbing up the climbing wave?
> All things have rest and ripen towards the grave
> In silence; ripen, fall, and cease.
> Give us long rest or death; dark death or dreamful ease."

He, in the still beauty of the night, could listen to every breath and hear each heart-throb of the woman he loved, as he looked into her face with its delicate and impassioned beauty—the beauty of the Francesca. All the passion that was in him stirred and trembled at it; the voluptuous spell of the hour stole over his thoughts and senses: he stooped towards her:

"Violet!"

It was only one word he spoke: but in it all was uttered to them both.

He drew her to his heart, pressing his lips on hers in kisses long and pasionate as those that doomed Francesca. And the stars shone softly, and the nightingales sang under the early roses in the fair spring night, while two human hearts met and were at rest.

* * * * * *

When they went back into the ball-room the waltz had its charm, the music its melody, the flowers their fragrance, again, for Violet; for a touch of the hand, a glance of the eyes, were sufficient eloquence betweem them and his whispered Good night, as he led her to her carriage, was dearer to her than any flattery poet or prince had ever breathed.

Nay, she was so happy that she even smiled brightly on Regalia, to her mother's joy—so happy, that when she reached the solitude of her chamber, she threw herself on her knees in her glittering gossamer ball-dress, with as unchecked and impetuous tears of rapture as if she had been Little Alma in her cottage home, rather than the beauty of the Season, with Coronets at her feet.

Lord Molyneux was a poor Irish peer; Sabretasche was rich, of high family, a man whose word was law, whose pre-eminence in fashion and tone was acknowledged, whose admiration was honour, and at whose offer of marriage any one would feel proud. His social position was so good, his settlements would be so unexceptionable, why! even our dear saint, the Bishop of Comet-Hock, though he shook his head over Sabretasche's sins, and expressed his opinion with considerable certainty concerning the warmth of his ultimate reception—you know where—would have handed him over with the greatest eagerness either of his pretty, extravagant daughters, had the Colonel deigned to ask for one of them. Therefore, when Sabretasche called the morning after, and made formal proposals for Violet, Jockey Jack, though considerably astonished; as society had settled that Sabretasche would never marry, as decidedly as it had settled that he was Mephistopheles in fascinating guise; was excessively pleased, assented readily, and had but one drawback on his mind—*telling his wife*—that lady having set her affections on things above, namely, little Regalia's balls and strawberry-leaves.

When he came out of Molyneux's study that morning, he naturally took his way to where his young love sat alone. She sprang up as he entered, with so fond a smile and so bright a blush, that Sabretasche thought he had never seen anything of half so much beauty, sated as he had been with beauty all his days.

"How lovely you are!" he said involuntarily, some minutes after, as he sat beside her on the couch, passing his hand over the soft perfumed hair that rested against his arm.

"Oh! do not tell me that. So many do!" cried Violet. "I like *you* to see in me what no one else sees."

"I see a great deal in you that no one else sees; whole tableaux of heart and mind, that no one else can have a

glance at," said Sabretasche, smiling. "But I am proud of your beauty, my lovely Francesca, for all that; though it may be a fact patent to all eyes."

"Then I am glad I have it! I would be a thousand times worthier of you if I could."

"The difficulty 'to be worthy' is not on *your* side," said he, with a shade of his old sadness. "I cannot bear to think that a life so pure as yours should be dedicated to a life so impure as mine. How spotless is your past, Violet —how dark is mine!"

"But how few have been my temptations—how many yours!" she interrupted him, softly. "I shall not love you the less, through whatever fires you may have passed. A woman's office is to console, not to censure; and if a man have trust in her enough to reveal her past sins or sorrows, her pleasure should be to teach him to forsake them and forget them."

"God bless you! If my care and tenderness can repay, your future shall reward you," he whispered. "What I have chiefly to tell you, is of wrongs done to me—wrongs that have sealed my lips to you till now—wrongs that have weighed on me for more than twenty long years, and made me the enigmatical and wayward man I probably have seemed. It is a long story, but one I would rather you should know before you fully give yourself to me."

She looked up at him with a silent promise that in heart she *was* already given to him; and leaning against him, Violet listened to the story—which every different scandal-monger had guessed at and each separate coterie tried, and vainly tried, to probe—the story of the Colonel's early life.

"You know," began Sabretasche, "that I was born and educated in Italy; indulged in all things by my father, and accustomed to every luxury, I grew up with much of the softness, voluptuousness, and passion of the Italian character, while at fifteen I knew life as many a man of five-and-twenty, brought up in seclusion and puritanism here, does not. But though I was in the Neapolitan service, and first in pleasure and levity among the young noblesse, I was still impressionable and romantic, with too much of the poetry and imagination of the country in me to be blasé, though I might be inconstant. I never recall the memory of my youth, *up to three-and-twenty*, without regret, it was so full of enjoy-

ment. In the summer of my four-and-twentieth year I left Naples, during the hot season, to stay with a friend of mine, whose estates lay in Tuscany. You were in Tuscany last year. How fair the country is under the shadow of the Apennines, with its brown olive wood and its glorious sunsets! It is strange how the curse of its ingratitude to its noblest sons still clings to it, so favoured by nature as it is! Della Torre's place was some six or seven miles from Sienna. I had gone up to Florence previously with my father, whose oldest friend was consul there; and travelling across Tuscany where malaria was then rife, a low fever attacked me. I was travelling vetturino—there were no railways there in those days—and my servant, finding that I was much too ill to go on, stopped of his own accord at a villiage not very far from Cachiano. The single act of a servant, who would have died to serve either me or my father, grew into the curse of my life! The name of the village was Montepulto. I dare say you passed through it; it is beautifully placed, its few scattered houses, with their high-peaked roofs, standing among the great groves of chesnuts and the grey thickets of olives, and vineyards and woods of genista and myrtle lying in the glowing sunlight. There Anzoletto stopped of his own accord. I was too ill to dissent; and as the carriage pulled up before the single wretched little inn the place afforded, the priest of the village, who was passing, offered me the use of his own house. I had hardly power to accept or refuse, but Anzoletto seized on the offer eagerly; and I was conveyed to the house, were for many days, I knew nothing of what passed, except that I suffered and dreamt. When I awoke from sleep one evening into consciousness, I saw the red sunset streaming through the purple vine around my lattice, Anzoletto asleep by my bedside, and a woman of great beauty watching me: of great beauty, Violet, but not *your* beauty. It seemed to me then the face of an angel: afterwards, God forgive her! I knew it as the face of a fiend. She was the niece, some said the daughter, of the priest of Montepulto. She was then five-and-twenty—when men love women their own age, or older, no good can come of it—and very beautiful: a Tuscan beauty, with blonde hair, and long, large, dark eyes; a lovely woman, in fact, with a certain languid grace which charmed one like music. She had, too, a certain aristocracy of air. The priest

himself was of noble though decayed family; a sleek, silent suave man, discontented with his humble position in Montepulto, but meek and lowly-minded, according to his own telling, as a *religieux* could be. I awoke to see Sylvia da' Castrone by my bedside. I recovered to have her constantly beside me, to gaze on her dangerous charms in the equally dangerous lassitude of convalescence. There is a certain languid pleasure in recovering from illness when one is young that makes all things seem *couleur de rose;* to me, with my impressionable senses and my southern temperament, there was something in this seclusion, shared with one as beautiful as the scenes among which I found her, which appealed irresistibly at once to poetry and passion, then the two dominant elements in my character; and to my desires, with which no ambitions greater than those of pleasure, and no pains harsher than those of love, had at that time mingled. Sufficient to say, I began to love this woman; as I recovered my love grew, till sense, prudence, pride, all that might have restrained me, were submerged in it. I loved her tenderly honourably, as ever man could love woman. I decked her in all the brilliant hues of a poet's fancy, I thought her the realization of all my sweetest ideals, I believed I loved for all eternity! I never stopped to learn her nature, her character, her thoughts; I never paused to learn if she in any way accorded to all my requirements and ideas; I loved her—I *married her!* Heavens, what that madness has cost me!"

The memory came over him with a deadly shudder; at its recollection the fell shade it had so long cast on him returned again, and he pressed Violet convulsively to his heart, as if with her warm, young love to crush out the burden of that cold and cruel dead one; the intelligence of his marriage cast a death-like chill over her, but even in its pain her first impulse was to console him. She lifted her head and kissed his cheek, the first caress she had ever offered him, as if to show more tenderly than words could give them, her sympathy and her affection. As silently he thanked her; then with an effort he resumed his story.

"We were married—by the Priest Castrone, and for a few weeks I believed my fairest dreams were realised. Violet, do not let my story pain you. All men have many early loves before they reach that fuller and stronger one which is the crown of their existence. I was happy, then, when I

was a boy, and when you were not born, my darling!—but you will give me greater happiness, as passionate, and more perfect. We were married; and for a week or two the surrender of my liberty seemed trifling pay indeed for the rapture it had brought me. The first shock back to actual life was a letter from my father. I dared not tell him of my hasty step; not from any anger that I should have met, but from the grief it would have caused him, for the only thing he had ever interdicted to me was an early or an unequal marriage. Fortunately, the letter was only to ask me to go to England on some business for him. I went, of course, taking Sylvia with me; and while in London, at her suggestion (it did not occur to me, or I should have made it), we had the ceremony again performed in a Protestant church. She said it pleased her to be united to me by the religion of my country as well as of her own. I loved her, and believed her, and was only too happy to make still faster, if I could, the fetters which bound me to a woman I idolised! We were a month or two in England; then we returned, and I bought her a little villa just outside Naples, where every spare moment that I had formerly given to dissipation or amusement, or idle dreaming by the sea-shore, I now gave to my wife. Oh, my love! my love! that any should have borne that title before you! Gradually now dawned on me the truth which she had carefully concealed during our earlier intercourse; that, graceful, gentle as she was in seeming, her temper was the temper of a fiend, her passions such as would have disgraced the vilest woman in a street brawl! Fancy what it was to me, with my taste, over-refined, accustomed at home to the gentlest tones and softest voices, abhorring what was harsh, vulgar, or unharmonious; to hear the woman I worshipped meet me, if I was a moment later than she expected, or the presents I brought her a trifle less costly than she had anticipated—meet me with a torrent of reproaches and invectives, her beautiful features distorted with fury, her soft eyes lurid with flame, her coral lips quivering with deadly venom, railing alike at her dogs, her servants, and her husband!—a fury!—a she devil! Good Heavens! what fiercer torment can there be for man than to be linked for life with a vixen, a virago? None can tell how it wears all the beauty of his life away: how surely, like the dropping of water on a stone, it eats away his peace; how it lowers

him, how it degrades him in his own eyes, how it drags him down to her own level, until it is a miracle if it do not rouse in him her own coarse and humiliating passions! Looking back on those daily scenes of disgrace and misery, which grew, as week and month rolled by, each time worse and worse, as my words ceased to have the slightest weight, I wonder how I endured them as I did; yet what is more incredible still, I yet loved her despite the hideous deformity of her fiendish nature, for a virago *is* a fiend, and of the deadliest sort. Still, though my life grew a very agony to me, and the weight of my secret from my father unbearable—I dared not tell him, for he was in such delicate health that the shock might have been fatal—I was never neglectful of her. Strange as it seems, little as the world would believe it, I *was* most constant to, and patient with her. I have done little good in my life, God knows, but in my duty as a husband to her, boy as I was, I may truly say I never failed. Some twelve months after our marriage she gave birth to a daughter. I was very sorry. I am not domestic—never shall be—and a child was the last inconvenience and annoyance I should have wished added to the ménage. I hoped, however, that it might soften her temper. It did not; and my life became literally a curse.

"At this time Sylvia's brother came to Naples, a showy, handsome, vulgar young man, with none of her exterior delicacy, who had been my detestation in Montepulto. Naturally he came to his sister's house, though he had no liking for me, for our antipathy was mutual; but he quartered himself on his sister, for he was poor, and had nothing to do. I generally, when I went to her after Castrone's arrival, found him and some of his friends—rollicking, do-nothing, *mauvais sujets*, like himself—smoking and drinking there; while Sylvia, decked with her old smiles, and adorned in the rich dress it had been my delight to bestow on her, lay on her couch, flirting her fan or touching her guitar; her lovely voice had been one of her greatest charms for me; but, once married, she never let me hear it. The men were odious to me, accustomed as I was to the best society of the old Italian noblesse, but I was so sick and heart-weary of the constant contentions which awaited me in my wife's home, that I was glad of the presence of other persons to prevent a scene of passion and abuse. The chief visitor at Sylvia's house was a friend of her brother's—an artist of

the name of Lani—a young fellow, exceedingly handsome, in a coarse, full-coloured style, though utterly detestable to me, with his loud voice, his vulgar foppism, and his would-be wit. He pleased Sylvia, however; a fact to which I never attached any importance, for I was not at all of a suspicious or sceptical nature then, and I am never one of those who think that a woman must necessarily be faithless to her husband because she likes the society of another man; on the contrary, a husband's hold on her affection must be very slight, if, to keep it, he must subject her to a seclusion almost conventional. Fidelity is no fidelity unless it has opportunity to swerve if it chose. So, to be *jealous* of Lani never occurred to me. I could not have stooped to it, had it even done so, for I held my own honour infinitely too high to dream that another could sully it. My trust and my security were rudely destroyed! Six months more went on. Sylvia clamoured ceaselessly for the acknowledgment of our marriage; in vain I pleaded to her that my father was on his death-bed, that the physician told me that the slightest mental shock would end his existence, that as soon as ever I had lost him, which must be at farthest at a few months' time, I would acknowledge her as my wife, and take her to England, where large property had just been left me. Such a plea would, you would think, have been enough for any woman's heart. It availed nothing with her; she made it the occasion for such awful scenes of execration and passion as I pray Heaven I may never see in woman or man again. I refused to endanger my father's life to please her caprices. The result was one so degrading to her, so full of shame and misery to me, that for several days I could not bring myself to enter her presence again. My love was gone, trampled down under her coarse and cruel invectives. In the place of my lovely and idolised wife I found a fiend: and I repented too late the irrevocable folly of an Early Marriage, the curse of so many men. When at last I went to what *should* have been my home, and *was* my hell, the windows of some of the rooms stood open; I walked up the gardens and through those windows into the rooms unannounced, as a man in his own house thinks he is at liberty to do. How one remembers trifles on such days of anguish as that was to me! I remember the very play of the sunshine on the ilex-leaves, I remember

how I brushed the boughs of the magnolias out of my path as I went up the verandah steps! Unseen myself, I saw Lani and my wife: his arms were round her, her head upon his breast, and I caught words which, though insufficient for law, told me of her infidelity. God help me; what I suffered! Young, unsuspicious, acutely sensitive, painfully alive to the slightest stain upon my honour, to be displaced by this vulgar, low-bred rival. Great Heavens! how bitter was my shame."

Violet's hands clenched on his in the horror of his wrongs:

"Oh, my dearest, my dearest! Would to Heaven I could avenge you!"

"Death has avenged me, my darling! Those few words which fell on my ear, in the first paralysed moment of the treachery which had availed itself of my unsuspecting hospitality to rob me of my honour, were sufficient for me. Even then I had memory enough to keep myself from stooping to the degradation of a spy, and from lowering myself before the man who had betrayed me. I went farther into the room, and they saw me. Lani had the grace to look guilty and ashamed; for only the day before he had asked me to lend him money, and I had complied. I remember being perfectly calm and self-possessed; one often is so in hours of the greatest suffering or excitement. I motioned him to the door; and he slunk like a hound afraid of a double thonging. He went out, and I was left alone—with my wife. Do you wonder that I have loathed and abhorred that title, holding it as a synonym with all that is base, and treacherous, and shameful—a curse from which there is no escape—a clog, rather than take which into his life a man had better forego all love, all pleasure, all passion—a mess of porridge with poison in the cup, for which he must give up all the priceless birthright of liberty and peace, never enjoyed and never valued till they are lost for ever, past recall?

"Do you think there was any shame, remorse, repentance, on her face, any regret for the abuse of all my confidence, any consciousness of the fidelity thus repaid, of the trust thus returned? No; in her face there was only a devilish laugh. She met me with a sneer and a scoff; she had the brazen falseness to deny her infidelity, for she knew

and began the life I have led ever since, plunging into dissipation, to still the fatal memories that stirred within me; revenging myself on that sex whom I had before trusted and worshipped; gaining for myself the reputation, to which your mother and the rest of the world still hold, of an unscrupulous profligate; none guessing how my heart ached while my lips laughed; how, sceptical by force, I yet longed to *believe;* and how the heart of my boyhood craved to love and be loved. Three years after my arrival here, the sight of Castrone, recalled to me the past in all its hideous horror. What errand think you he, shameless as his sister, came upon to me? None less than to extort money from me by the threat, in Sylvia's name, that she would come over to England and proclaim herself my wife. I was weak to yield his demand to him, and not to have the servants show him at once out of the house; but money was plentiful, his presence was loathsome; the idea of seeing that woman, of being forced to endure her presence, of having the mistress of young Lani known in England as my wife, was so horrible, that, without thinking, I snatched at the only means of security. I paid him what he asked—exorbitant of course—and hung that other mill-stone round my neck for life! From that time, to within the last twelvemonth, her brother has come to me, whenever his or her exchequer failed; she was not above living on the husband she had wronged! For twenty years I kept my secret; all I had to remind me of my fatal tie was the annual visit of Castrone. Can any one wonder that when I met you I forgot oftentimes my own fetters, and, what was worse, your danger? In my many loves I have only, I confess, sought pleasure and revenged myself on Sylvia's sex—how could I think well or mercifully of women? But you roused in me something infinitely deeper, and more tender. In you the soft idyls of my lost dreams lived again; with you the grace and glory of my lost youth returned. Before, as a man of the world—bitterly as I felt the secret disgrace of it—I experienced no inconvenience from the tie. I wooed many lightly, won them easily, forsook them recklessly. None of the three could I do with you. *They* only charmed my senses; *you* won into my heart; they had amused me, you grew dear to me—a wide difference, Violet, in a woman's influence upon a man.

At first, I confess I flirted carelessly with you. But when the full beauties of your heart and mind unfolded themselves to me for the first time, I remembered mercy, even while I learnt that for the last time I loved! How great were my sufferings I need not tell you. Unable to bear the misery of constant intercourse with you, conscious in myself that if long under the temptation I should give way under it, and say words for which, when you knew all, you might learn to hate me—"

"Oh, never, never!" whispered Violet, fondly. "I should always love you, come what might."

Sabretasche passed his hand fondly over her brow:

"I knew well that you would. But it was the very consciousness that, *if* you loved, you would love very differently to the frivolous and inconstant women of our set, which roused me into mercy to you. I left for the south of France, to give myself time for reflection, or—vain hope! —to forget you, as I had forgotten many; to give you time to find, if it so chanced, some one who, more worthy of your attachment, would reward it with the legitimate happiness which the world smiles upon. In a week from leaving London I was in the Pyrenees, intending to stay there for some time for the sake of the sea-bathing; but the first evening I was at Biarritz, I took up over my chocolate an Italian newspaper—how it chanced to come there I know not—it was the 'Nazionale' of Naples. Among the death's I read that of my wife! Great Heaven! that a husband's first thoughts should be a thanksgiving for the death of the woman he once fondly loved, over whose sleep he once watched, and in whom he once reposed his name, his trust, his honour! I read it over and over again, the letters danced and swam before my eyes; I, whom the world says nothing can disturb or ruffle, shook in every nerve, as I leaned out into the evening air, dizzy and delirious with the rush of past memories, and future hopes, that surged over my brain! With that one fateful line I was *free!* No prisoner ever welcomed liberty with such rapturous ecstasy as I. The blight was off my life, the curse was taken from my soul, my heart beat free again as it had never done during the twenty long years that the bitter shame and misery of my marriage had weighed upon me. Love and youth and joy were mine again. A new existence, fresher and fairer, had

come back to me. My cruel enemy, who had given my honour to a cur, and who had yet stooped to live on the money she robbed from the boy-husband she had wronged, was dead, and I at last was free—free to offer to you the fondest love man ever offered woman—free to receive at your hands the golden gifts, robbed from me for so long. Violet,—I know that I shall not ask for them in vain?"

She lifted her face to his with broken words, in her eyes gleaming unshed tears; and his lips lingered upon hers, the new youth and joy he coveted came back to Sabretasche, never, he fondly thought, to leave him again while both their lives should last.

## CHAPTER XX.

### ONE OF THE SUMMER DAYS BEFORE THE STORM.

The Derby fell late that year. The day was a brilliant, sunshiny one, as it ought to be, for it is the sole day in our existence when we are excited, and do not, as usual, think it necessary to be bored to death to save our characters. We confess to a wild anxiety at the magic word "Start!" to which no other sight on earth could rouse us. We watch with thrilling eagerness the horses rounding the Corner as we should watch the beauty of no Galatea, however irresistible; and we see the favourite do the distance with enthusiastic intoxication, to which all the other excitements on earth could never fire our blood! From my earliest recollection since I rode races with the stable boys at five years old, and was discovered indulging in that reprehensible pastime by my tutor (a mild and inoffensive Ch. Ch. man, to whom "Bell's Life" was a dead letter, and the chariot-racing at Rome and Elis the only painful reading in the classics), my passion has been the Turf. The Turf!—there must needs be some strange attraction in our English sport. It has lovers more faithful than women ever win; it has victims, voluntary holocausts upon its altars, more numerous than any creed that ever brought men to martyrdom; its iron chains are hugged where other silken fetters have grown wearisome; its fascination lasts while the taste of the wine may pall and the

beauty of feminine grace may satiate. Men are constant to its mystic charms where they tire of love's beguilements; they give with a lavish hand to it what they would deny to any living thing. Olden chivalry, modern ambition, boast no disciples so faithful as the followers of the Turf; and, to the Turf, men yield up what women whom they love would ask in vain; lands, fortunes, years, energies, powers; till their mistress has beggared them of all—even too often robbed them of honour itself!

To the Derby, of course, we went—Curly, I, and some other men, in De Vigne's drag, lunched off Rhenish, and Guinness, and Moët, and all the delicacies Fortnum and Mason ever packed in a hamper for Epsom; and drove back to mess along the crowded road. Dropping the others en route, De Vigne drove me on to dine with him at his own house in Wilton-crescent.

"Come into my room first, old fellow," he said, as we passed up the stairs. "I bought my wedding presents for Sabretasche and his wife that will be, yesterday, and want to show them to you. Holloa! what the deuce is that fellow Raymond doing?—reading my letters as I live! I think I am fated to come across rascals! However, as they make up nine-tenths of the world, I suppose I can't be surprised at the constant rencontres!"

From the top of the staircase we saw, though at some distance, straight through into De Vigne's bedroom, the door of which stood open. At the writing table in the centre sat his head valet, Raymond, so earnestly reading some of the correspondence upon it, that he never heard or saw us. De Vigne sometimes wrote his letters in his bedroom; he always read those by the first post over his matutinal coffee; and as he was immeasurably careless both with his papers and his money, his servants had always full opportunity to peruse the one and take the other. If he had seen the man taking ten pounds off his dressing-table, he would have had a fling at human nature, thought it was the way of that class of people, and kept the man on, because he was a useful servant, and no more of a thief, probably, than another would be. But—no matter in what rank—a dishonourable or a sneaky thing, a breach of trust in any way, always irritated him beyond conception; he had been betrayed in greater or minor things so often, and treachery

was so utterly foreign to his own frank and impetuous nature, that his impatience at it was very pardonable. I could see his eyebrows contract ominously; he went up, stretched his hand over the man's shoulder, and took the letter quietly out of his grasp.

"Go to Mills for your next month's wages, and leave this evening."

Raymond, sleek, and smooth, and impenetrable as he was, started violently, and changed colour; but his answer was very ready.

"Why, Major? I was merely sorting your papers, sir. You have often ordered me to do that."

"No lies—leave the room!" said his master, briefly, as he turned to me. "Arthur, here are the things I mentioned. Come and look at them."

His valet did not obey his order; he still lingered. He began again, in his soft, purring tone:

"You wouldn't dismiss me like this, Major, if you knew what I could tell you."

"Leave the room, and send Robert to me," said De Vigne, with that stern hauteur which always came up when people teased him. He had had his own way from his infancy, and was totally unaccustomed to being crossed. It is bad training for the world for a man to have been obeyed from his cradle.

"You would give me a good deal, Major, to know what I know. I have a secret in my keeping, sir, that you would pay me handsomely to learn—"

"Silence—and leave the room!" reiterated De Vigne, with an impatient stamp of his foot.

Raymond bowed, with the grace becoming a groom of the chambers.

"Certainly, sir. I hope you will pardon me for having troubled you."

Wherewith he backed out with all the sang-froid imaginable, and De Vigne turned to me:

"Cool fellow, isn't he?"

"Yes, but you might as well have heard what he had to say."

"My dear fellow, why?" cried De Vigne, with his most grandiose and contemptuous smile. "What could that man possibly know that could concern me? It was only a

ruse to get money out of me, or twist his low-bred curiosity in spying over my letters into a matter of moment. I was especially annoyed at it, because the letter he was reading is a note from Alma; nothing in it—merely to answer a question I asked her about one of her pictures; but you know the child has an enthusiastic way of expressing herself at all times—means nothing, but sounds a great deal, and the 'Dear Sir Folko,' and 'your ever grateful Little Alma,' and all the rest of it—the days are so long when I don't go to see her, and she envies the women who are in my set and always with me—and all that—reads rather . . . *I* know how she means it, but a common man like Raymond will put a very different significance upon it."

"Most probably. *I* know how she means it too; still, you know the old saying, De Vigne, relative to toying with edged tools?"

"No, I don't," said De Vigne, curtly; "or at least I should say I know edged tools, when I see them, as well as you do, and am old enough, if I did come across them, not to cut myself with them. I can't think what has possessed Sabretasche and you to try and sermonise to me! Heaven knows you need to lecture yourselves, both of you! I don't stand it very well from *him;* but I'll be shot if I do from you, you young dog, whom I patronised in jackets in Frestonhills! Get out with you, and let Robert take the Derby dust off you in the blue-room."

And he threw Alma's note into a private drawer (to be kept, I wonder?), and pushed me out by the shoulders.

No Cup day ever was so ill-bred as to send dusky English rain-drops on the exquisite toilettes that grace the most aristocratic race in the universe, and we had "Queen's weather" for Ascot. We had all betted on the Colonel's chestnut, who won the Ascot Cup, distancing all the rest of the first flight at an easy swinging gallop, without any apparent effort:* and when we had seen the race fairly run, we went up to the Molyneux carriage to congratulate the Colonel on his chestnut's triumph; Sabretasche being missed from his usual circle of titled betting-men and great turfites, and, for the first time in all his life, watching Ascot run, with his attention more given to the face beside him than the course before.

* I have taken a liberty with the Ascot of '54, which I trust will be pardoned me at the Corner!—*Ouida.*

His old-accustomed bay-window saw comparatively little of him; his mornings were given to Violet in the tête-à-tête of her boudoir; in the Ride and the Ring he was by her side or in her carriage; and the whist-tables of the United, the guinea points of the Travellers', the coulisses, the lansquenet parties, saw but very little of him. The Colonel, for the time being, was lost to us and to "life," which he had lived so recklessly and graced so brilliantly for so many years; and I suppose his new occupation charmed him, for when we did get an hour or two of him, he was certainly more delightful than ever: there was such a joyous ring in his ever-brilliant wit—such gentleness, to all people and all things, out of the abundance of his own happiness—such a depth of rest and contentment, in lieu of that touching and deep-seated melancholy, which had gone down so far into his character under his gay and fashionable exterior, that it had seemed as if nothing would uproot it. So happily does human life forget its past sorrows in present joy, as the green meadows grow dark or golden, according as the summer sun fades on and off them! His marriage was fixed to take place in a few weeks, and all the prosaic details which attend on love in these days of matter-of-fact and almighty dollars (how often to tarnish and corrode it!) grew in his hands into the generous gifts of love to love, the outward symbols of the inward worship. So surrounded, and with such a future lying before her, in its brilliant colours and seductive witchery, can you not fancy that our over-radiant beauty looked—how, words are not warm enough to tell; it would need a brush of power diviner than Titian's to picture to you Violet Molyneux's face as it was then, the incarnation of young, shadowless, brilliant, impassioned life!

"I knew we should win!" she said, as we approached her barouche. "Did I not tell you so, Major De Vigne?"

"You did, fair prophetess; and if you will always honour me with your clairvoyant instructions, I will always make up my books accordingly."

"The number of bets *I* have made to-day is something frightful," answered Violet. "If that darling horse had failed me I should have been utterly ruined in gloves."

"As it is, you will have bracelets and negligés enough to fill Hunt and Roskell's! You are most dangerous to ap-

proach, Miss Molyneux, in more ways than one," said Vane Castleton, who was leaning against the carriage door flirting with her mother.

"Oh! pray don't, Lord Vane; you talk as if I were some grim and terrible Thalestris!" cried Violet, with some contemptuous impatience, looking at Sabretasche with a laugh.

"Thalestris!" repeated Sabretasche, smiling. "You have but very little of the Amazon about you; not enough, perhaps, if your lines had fallen in hard places."

"Instead of rose-leaves! Yet I think I can fight my own battles?"

"Oh yes!" laughed Sabretasche. "I never meant to hint but that you had, in very great perfection, that prerogative par excellence of woman, that Damascus blade, whose brilliant chasing makes us treat it as a toy, until the point has wounded us—the tongue!"

"If mine is a Damascus blade, yours is an Excalibur itself! *Le fourgon se moque de la pelle, monsieur!*"

"An English inelegance taking refuge in a foreign idiom! What true feminine diplomacy!" laughed Sabretasche, resting his eyes on her with that deep tenderness for her, for all she did, and said, and thought, which had grown into his life.

She laughed too—a sweet, gay laugh of perfect happiness.

"Ah! there is Her Majesty going off the stand—before Queen Violet goes too? Colonel Sabretasche tells me, Major de Vigne, that you know the artist of that lovely 'Louis Dix-sept,' and that she is a lady living at Richmond. May I go and see her?"

"Certainly, if you will be so kind."

De Vigne felt a certain annoyance; why, I doubt if he could have told—a certain selfish desire to keep his little flower blooming unseen, save by his own eyes, acting unconsciously upon him.

"The kindness will be to me. Is she young?"

"Yes."

"And very pretty?"

"Really I cannot say; ladies' tastes differ from ours on such points."

"I hope she is," said Violet, plaintively. "I never did like plain people, never could! I dare say it is very wrong,

but I think one likes a handsome face as naturally as one prefers a lily to a dandelion; and I am quite certain the artist of that sketch *must* be pretty—she could not help it."

"She *is* pretty," said Sabretasche; "at least attractive—what you will call so."

"Then will you take me to see her to-morrow, Major de Vigne, and introduce us? Of course you will; no one refuses me anything! You can come with me, can you not, Vivian? We will all ride down there early, shall we?"

"Yes, and lunch at the Dilcoosha, if Lady Molyneux permit?"

"Go where? Do what?" asked the Viscountess, languidly, turning reluctantly from her, I presume, interesting conversation with Vane Castleton.

Sabretasche repeated his question.

"To see an artist, and lunch with you? Oh yes, I shall be very happy. I don't think we have any engagements for to-morrow morning," said Lady Molyneux, turning again to Castleton. "Are you going to Lumley's to-night, Vane?"

The morning after, half-a-dozen of us rode down out of Lowndes Square. First, the Colonel and Violet; next, the Viscountess and her pet, Vane Castleton; then De Vigne and I—De Vigne, I must confess, in one of his most haughty, reserved, and impatient moods, annoyed, more than he knew, at having to take people to see Alma, whom he had had to himself so long that he seemed to consider any other visit to her as an invasion on his own "vested interests." Besides, he was irritated to be tricked into taking Vane Castleton there, of all men in the world! Lady Molyneux had asked him; De Vigne knew nothing of his addition to the party until he had reached Lowndes Square, and to make any comment on, or opposition to it, would have been as useless as unwise.

"Does Miss Tressillian live alone with an old nurse, Major De Vigne?" Lady Molyneux was asking, in that voice which was languor and superciliousness embodied. "How very queer—so young a girl! To be sure, she is only an artist! Artists *are* queer people generally. Still, it is very odd!"

"Artists, like other people, must live; and if they have happened to have lost their parents, they cannot live with

them, I presume," responded De Vigne, dryly. The Viscountess had always an irritating effect upon his nerves.

"No, of course not: still there are plenty of places where a girl can take refuge that are most irreproachable—a school for instance. She would be much better, I should fancy as a teacher, or a—"

"She happens to be a gentlewoman," interrupted De Vigne, quietly, "and nurtured in as much luxury and refinement as your daughter."

"Indeed!" said the Viscountess, with a nasty sneer and upraised eyebrows. "Pray, is she quite a—quite a *proper* person for Violet to visit?"

De Vigne's slumbering wrath roused up; every vein glowed with righteous anger and scorn for the pharisaic Peeress, of whose own under-currents he knew a story or two not quite so spotless as might have been.

"Lady Molyneux, if the ladies your daughter meets in our set at Court and Drawing-Room, balls and operas, the immaculate Cordelias and Lucretias of English Matronage, could lay claim to half as pure a life, and half as pure a heart, as the young girl you are so ready to suspect and to condemn, it might be better for them and—for their husbands!"

It was a more unspoken, and, in this case, more personal, speech than is customary to the bland reserve and reticence customary in "good society," where we may sin, but may not say we do, and where it is only permitted to ridicule or blackguard our friends behind their backs. The Viscountess reddened under her delicate rouge, and turned with a laugh to Castleton The white gate and dark thatched gables of St. Crucis Farm were now close at hand, and De Vigne rode forward.

"What a picturesque place!" cried Violet, dropping her reins on her mare's neck. "Oh, Vivian, do look at those little lovely yellow chickens, and that great China rose, climbing all over the house, and the veritable lattice windows, and that splendid black cat in the sunshine! Wouldn't you like to live here?"

Sabretasche shook his head, and would have crossed himself had he been a Catholic.

"My dear Violet! Heaven forfend! I cannot say I should."

"Nor she either," laughed De Vigne. "She will be much

more in her element in its neighbour, your luxurious Dilcoosha."

Sabretasche smiled, Violet's delicate colour deepened, to vie with the China roses she admired, while the Colonel lifted her from her saddle close to the objects of her attachment, the little lovely yellow chickens, surely the prettiest of all new-born things; humiliatingly pretty beside the rough ugliness of new-born man, who piques himself on being lord of all created creatures; God knows why, except that he is slowest in development, and quickest in evil!

Certainly the old farm-house looked its best that day; the grey stone, the black wooden porch, the dark thatch, with its sombre lichens, that had all appeared so dark and dreary in the dim February light in which we first saw them, were only antiquated in the full glow of the June sunlight. The deep cool shadows of the two great chestnut trees beside it with their large leaves and snowy pyramidal blossoms, the warm colour of the China roses and the honeysuckles against its walls, of the full-blossomed apple-trees, and the fragrant lilacs—those delicate perfumy boughs that Horace Walpole, the man of wit and gossip, courts and salons, patches and powders, still found time to love—gave it the picturesqueness and brightness which charmed Violet at first sight; for not more different is the view of human life in youth and age, than the view of the same place in summer and winter. If our life were but all youth! if our year were but all summer!

Out of the wide, low lattice window of her own room, half shadowed by the great branches of the chestnut-trees, with their mélange of green and white, yet with the full glow of the golden morning sunbeams, and the rose-hued reflex of the China roses upon her, Alma was leaning as we alighted. Like her home, she chanced to look her prettiest and most picturesque that day; a picture shrined in the dark chestnut-boughs and the glowing flowers—a picture which we could see, though she could not see us.

"Is that Miss Tressillian? How lovely she is!" cried Violet, enthusiastically.

Sabretasche, thinking of her alone, smiled at her ecstasies. The Viscountess raised her glass with supercilious and hypercritic curiosity. Castleton did the same, with the look in his eyes that he had given the night before to the very superior

ankles of a new danseuse. De Vigne caught the look—by George! how his eyes flashed—and he led the way into the house, sorely wrathful with him. Alma's innate high breeding never showed itself more than now when she received her unexpected influx of visitors. The girl had seen no society, had never been "finished," nor taught to "give a reception;" yet her inborn self-possession and tact never deserted her, and if she had been brought up all her days in the salons of the Tuileries or St. James, it would have been impossible to show more calm and winning grace than she did at this sudden inroad on the conventual solitude of her studio. Violet and she fraternised immediately; it was no visit from a fashionable beauty to a friendless artist, for Violet was infinitely too thorough bred not to recognise the intuitive aristocracy which in the Little Tressillian was thoroughly stamped in blood and feature, manner and mind, and would have survived all adventitious circumstances or surroundings. There was, besides, a certain resemblance, which we had often noticed in their natures, their vivacity, and their perfect freedom from all affectations.

The Viscountess sat down on a low chair in a state of supercilious apathy. She cared nothing for pictures. The parrot's talk, which was certainly very voluble, made her head ache, and Vane Castleton was infinitely too full of admiration of Alma to please her ladyship. De Vigne, when he had done the introductory part of the action, played with Sylvio, only looking up when Alma addressed him, and then answering her more distantly and briefly than his wont. He could have shot Castleton with great pleasure for the free glance of his bold light eyes, and such a murderous frame of mind rather spoils a man for society, however great he may generally be as a conversationalist!

We, however, managed to keep up the ball of talk very gaily, even without him. It was chiefly, of course, upon art—turning on Alma's pictures, which drew warm praises from Violet and Castleton, and, what was much more, from that most fastidious critic and connoisseur, the Colonel. We were in no hurry to leave. Castleton evidently thought the *chevelure dorée* charming; women were all of one class to him—all to be bought! some with higher prices and some with lower, and he drew no distinction between them, except that some were blondes and some brunes. Violet liked leaning

to sit on a court-martial on his own heart, to cut it up and put it in a microscope, like Gosse over a frog or a dianthus, or to imitate De Quincey's habit of speculating on his own emotions. He was utterly incapable of laying his own feelings before him, as an anatomist lays a human skeleton, counting the bones, and muscles, and points of ossification, it is true, but missing the flesh, the colouring, the quick flow of blood, the warm moving life which gave to that bare skeleton all its glow and beauty. De Vigne acted, and did not stop to ask himself why he did so nine times out of ten; therefore he never inquired, or thought of inquiring, why he had experienced such unnecessary and unreasonable anger at Castleton and Alma, but only felt remorsefully that he had lacked kindness in not sympathising with the poor child in her very natural delight at her invitation to Lowndes-square. Whenever he thought he had been unkind, if it were to a dog, he was not easy till he had made reparation; and not stopping to remember that unkindness from him might be the greater kindness in the end, he sent her down on Thursday morning the best bouquet the pick of Covent Garden could give him, clasped round with a *parure* of jewels, as delicate in workmanship as rare in value, with a line, "Wear them to-night in memory of your grandfather's friendship for "Sir Folko.'"

De Vigne's virtues led him as often into temptation as other men's vices. When he sent those flowers and pearls to the Little Tressillian, I am certain he had no deeper motive, no other thought, than to make reparation for his unkindness, and to give her as delicately as he could ornaments he knew that she must need. With him no error was foreplanned and premeditated. He might have slain you in a passion, perhaps, but he could never have stiletto-ed you in cold blood. There was not a taint of malice or design, not a trace of the "serpent nature" in his character.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### HOW THE OLDEN DELIRIUM AWOKE LIKE A GIANT FROM HIS SLUMBERS.

THE Molyneux rooms in Lowndes Square were full, not crowded; the Viscountess knew too well the art of society to cram her apartments, as is the present habitude, till lords and ladies jostle and crush one another like so many Johns and Marys crowding before a fair—the rooms were full, and "brilliantly attended," as the morning papers had it next day, for though they were of the fourth order of nobility, the Molyneux had as exclusive a set as any in town, and knew "everybody." "Everybody!" Comprehensive yet exclusive phrase! meaning, in *their* lips, just the crême de la crême, and nothing whatever below it; meaning in a Warden's, all his Chapter; in a schoolgirl's, all her school-fellow's; in a leg's, all the "ossy-men;" in an author's, those who read him; in a painter's, those who praise him: in a rector's, those who testimonialise and saint him! In addition to the *haute volée* of fashion there was the *haute volée* of intellect at the Viscountess's Reception, for Lady Molyneux dearly loved to have a lion (though whether a writer who honours the nations, or an Eastern prince in native ugliness and jewellery, was perhaps immaterial to her); and many of our best authors and artists were not only acquaintances of hers, but intimate friends of Sabretasche's, who at any time threw over the most aristocratic crush for the simplest intellectual reunion, preferring, as he used to say, the God-given cordon of Brain to the ribbons of Bath or Garter.

I went there early, leaving a dinner-party in Eaton Square sooner than perhaps I should have done, from a trifle of curiosity I felt to see how the "Little Irishman" comported herself in her new sphere; and I confess I did not expect to see her quite so thoroughly at home, and quite so much of a star in her own way as I found her to be. I have told you she had nothing of Violet's regular and perfect beauty—regular as a classic statue, perfect as an engraver's most genuine picture—yet, somehow or other, I have told as well in her way as the lovely Irish girl in hers;

send him to her, in sheer defiance), he joined the group gathered round the little Tressillian, whose radiant smile at his approach made Castleton sneer and poor Curly swear *sotto voce* under his moustaches. De Vigne, however, did not say much to her; he shook hands with her, said one or two things, and then talking with Tom Severn (whom Alma had attracted to her side) about the ties shot off at Hornsey Wood that morning, left the little lady so much to the other men, that though he was within a yard of her, she thought she preferred him in her studio at St. Crucis than in the crowded salons of that "set" of his in which she had wished to meet him.

De Vigne talked to those about him, but he meanwhile watched her dancing, lightly and gracefully as a Spanish girl or an Eastern bayadère; watched her, the fact dawning on him, with a certain warning thrill, that she was not, after all, a little thing to laugh at, and play with, and pet innocently, as he did his spaniel, but a woman, as dangerous to men as she was attractive to them, who could no more be trifled with, without the trifling falling back again upon the trifler, than absinthe can be drunk like water, or opium eaten long without delirium.

Certain jealousies surged up in his heart, certain embers that had slumbered long began to quicken into flame; the blood that he had tried to chill into ice-water rushed through his veins with something of its natural rapidity and fire. He had pooh-poohed Sabretasche's earnest and my half-laughing counsels; he now heeded as little what ought to have roused him much more, the throbs of his own heart, and the passions stirring into life within him.

She was a child; his own honour was guard sufficient against love growing up between them. So he would have said if he had ever reasoned on it. But he was not cold enough for such self-examination, and even now, though jealousy was waking up in him, he was wilfully blind to it, and to the irritation, which the sight of the other men crowding round, and claiming her, excited in him.

"Don't you mean to dance with me?" whispered Alma, piteously, as he passed her after the waltz was over.

"I seldom dance," he answered.

It was the truth; waltzing used to be a passion with him, but since the Trefusis had waltzed his reason away, the dance had brought disagreeable associations with it.

'But you *must* waltz with me!"

"Hush! All the room will hear you," said De Vigne, smiling in spite of himself. "Let me look at your list, then!"

"Oh, I would not make any engagements. I might have been engaged ten deep, but I kept them all free for you."

"May I have the honour of the next waltz with you, then, Miss Tressillian!" asked De Vigne, in a louder tone, for the benefit of the people around.

As he put his arm round her, and whirled her into the circle, he remembered, with a shudder at the memory, that the last woman he had waltzed with was the Trefusis. In India wilder sports and more exciting amusements had filled his time, and since he had been in England he had chiefly frequented men's society.

"You had my note, Sir Folko?" was Alma's first question. "I could never thank you for your beautiful gifts, I could never tell you what happiness they gave me."

"You have said far more than enough, petite," said De Vigne, hastily.

"No," persisted Alma, "I could *never* say enough to thank you for all your lavish kindness to me."

"Nonsense," laughed De Vigne. "I have given jewels to many other women, Alma, but none of them thought they had any need to feel any gratitude to me. The gratitude they thought was due to *them* for having allowed me to offer them the gift."

He spoke with something of a sneer, from the memory of how—to him, at least—women high and low, had ever been cheap, and worthless as most cheap things are; and the words cast a chill over his listener. For the first time the serpent entered into Alma's Eden—entered, as in Milton's apologue, with the first dawning knowledge of Passion. Unshed tears sprang into her eyes, making them flash and gleam as brilliantly as the gems he had given her.

"If you did not give them from kindness," she said, passionately, "take them back. My happiness in them is gone."

"Silly child!" said De Vigne, half smiling at her vehement tones. "Should I have given them to you if I had not cared to do so? On the contrary, I am always glad

to give you any pleasures if I can. But do you suppose, Alma, that I have gone all my life without giving presents to any one till I gave them to you?"

Alma laughed, but she looked, half vexed, up in his face even still:

"No, I do not, Sir Folko; but you should not give them to me *as* you gave them to other women, any more than you should class me with other women. You have told me you did not?"

"My dear Alma, I cannot puzzle out all your wonderful distinctions and definitions," interrupted De Vigne, hastily. "Have you enjoyed the evening as much as you anticipated?"

"Oh, it is delightful!" cried the little lady, with that rapid alternation from sorrow to mirth due to her extreme susceptibility to external impressions.

De Vigne raised his eyebrows, and interrupted her again, somewhat unwarrantably:

"You are a finished coquette, Alma."

Her blue eyes opened wide under their black lashes.

"Sir Folko! I?"

"Yes, you. I am not finding fault with you for it. All women are who can be. I only wonder where, in your seclusion, you have learned all those pretty wiles and ways that women, versed in society from their childhood, fail to acquire. Who has taught you all those dangerous tricks, from whom have you imitated your skill in captivating Curly and Castleton and Severn, and all those other men, however different their styles or tastes? You are an accomplished flirt, petite, and I congratulate you on your proficiency."

He spoke with most unnecessary bitterness, much more than he was conscious of, and certainly much more than he ought to have used, for the little Tressillian was just as much of a coquette—if you like to call it so—and no more of one than De Vigne in reality liked; for he measured women by their power of fascination. But now the devil of jealousy had entered into him.

Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered a little; Alma was not a woman to sit down tranquilly under injustice; her nature was too passionate not to be indignant under accusation, though it was at the same time much too tender not to forgive it as rapidly where she loved the offender.

"For shame, Sir Folko! 'Coquette!' I have heard you use that word to women you despise. Coquette, I have heard you say, means one to whom all men are equal. I thank you greatly for your kind opinion of me!"

"Hush, hush! Heaven knows that was far from my thoughts! Forgive me, I know you have no artifice or affectation, and I should never attribute them to you. Let nothing I say vex you. If you knew all you would not wonder that I am sceptical and suspicious, and sometimes perhaps unjust."

He spoke kindly, gently, almost fondly. He was angry with himself for having spoiled her unclouded pleasure. She looked up in his face with a saddened, reproachful tenderness, which had never been in her eyes before, different to their impetuous vexation, different still to their frank, affectionate confidence.

"Yes; but trust *me* at least, if you doubt all the world?"

"I do!"

He spoke in a low whisper, her heart throbbing against his, her breath upon his cheek, his hand closing tight upon hers in the caress of the waltz; and with the voluptuous swell of the music, the tender and passionate light of the eyes that were lifted to his, for the first time there awoke, and trembled in them both, the dawn of that passion which the one had never before known, which to the other had been so fierce and fatal a curse.

At that moment the music ceased: De Vigne gave her his arm in silence, and soon after seated himself by her on one of the couches, while other men came round her, taking ices and talking the usual ball-room chit-chat. It was strange how much that single evening did for Alma; she was admired, courted, followed; she learnt her own power, she received the myrtle crown due to her own attractions, to the grace and talent of Nature she seemed to acquire the grace and talent of Society, and to the charming and winning ways of her girlhood she added the witchery, wit, and fascination of a woman of the world. In that one night she grew tenfold more attractive than before; she was like a bird, who never sings so well till he has tried his wings.

Not even Lady Ela, or Madame la Duchesse, had more men anxious for the pleasure of taking them to their

carriages than the young débutante. Curly's soft words pleaded for the distinction; Tom Severn would fain have had it; Castleton tried hard to give her his arm; but De Vigne kept them all off, and took her down with that tranquil appropriativeness which he thought his intimacy with her would warrant. He would not have been best pleased if he had heard the laugh and the remarks that followed them, from the men that were on the staircase watching the women leave! The gas-light shone on her eyes, as she leaned forwards in the carriage, and put out both her hands to him.

"Sir Folko! if I could but thank you as I feel!"

"If I could but prove to you you have nothing to thank me for!"

"At least, I have all the happiness that is in my life?"

"Happiness? Hush!" said De Vigne, passionately. "How can you tell but that some day you may hate me, loathe me, and wish to God that we had never met?"

"I? O Heaven! no. If I were to die by your hand, I would pray with my latest breath that God might bless you,"

"You would? Poor child! Alma, good night!"

"Good night."

Those two good nights were very soft and low—spoken with a more tender intonation than any words that had ever passed between them. His hands closed tightly upon hers; the love of woman, his favourite toy in early youth, the stake on which he risked so much in early manhood, was beguiling him again. His head was bent so that his lips almost touched her brow; perhaps they might have touched, and lingered there—but, "Way for the Duchesse de Vieillecour's carriage!" was shouted; the coachman started off his horses, and De Vigne stood beneath the awning, with the bright gas glare around and the dark street beyond him, while his heart stirred and his pulses quickened as, since his marriage-day, he had vowed they never should again for any woman's sake.

He walked home alone, without waiting for his night-cab, or, indeed, remembering it, smoking as he paced the streets, forsaken in the early morning save by some wretched women reeling out of a gin-palace, or some groups quitting a casino with riotous mirthless laughter. He walked

home, restless, impatient, ill at ease, with two faces before him haunting him as relentlessly as in the phantasmagoria of fever—the faces of the Trefusis and of Alma—the one with her sensual, the other with her spiritual loveliness; the one who had destroyed his youth, the other who had given it back to him, side by side in their startling and forcible contrast, as in the Eastern fable the good angel sits on the right shoulder and the bad angel on the left, neither leaving us, each pursuing us throughout the day and night.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE COST OF HONOUR.

THE ball at Lady Molyneux's was on the 25th of June. On the day after, just a fortnight before the 10th, which was fixed as his marriage-day, Sabretasche gave a fête at his Dilcoosha. That exquisite place, which had always reminded me of Vathek and of Fonthill, it had been a whim of his to embellish in every possible way before his engagement; and now he seemed to take a delight in making Violet's home as luxurious as his wealth and his art could combine to render it. I went over it with him one day, and I told him that if I ever wanted to do up old Longholme as lavishly, I hoped he would come and act as superintendent of the works. Certainly, if Violet had married the highest peer in the realm, she could not have had a more lovely shrine than the Dilcoosha. Regalia's grim and grand old castle in Merionethshire would have looked very dull and dark after Sabretasche's villa. The grounds were artificially made as wild and luxuriant as any woodland in the heart of the provinces, while yet all the resources of horticulture were lavished on them. The conservatories excelled Chatsworth's; with here and there, among their glories of blossom and colouring, a marble group or a single statuette, such as the rifling of Parisian, and Florentine, and Roman studios could give him. The suite of drawing-rooms opened out of them, a soft, demi-lumière streaming through rose-hued glass on a thousand gems of

art that were gathered in them. Violet's morning room (I hate the word "boudoir;" stockbrokers' Hackney or Peckham villas boast their "boudoirs," and tradesmen's wives sit puffing under finery in "boudoirs," while their lords take invoices in white aprons, or advertise their "Nonpareil trousers," their genuine Glenlivat, or *ne plus ultra* coats!) was hung in pale green and gold with a choice library collected in quaint mediæval book-stands, the deep bay-window opening on to the river view the grounds afforded, the walls painted in illustration of Lallah Rookh, and the greatest gems the house contained in sculpture or in art shrined here in her honour. Her bedroom and her dressing-room were unrivalled; the bed was of carved ivory, the curtains of rose silk and white lace, caught up by a chain of flowers moulded and chased in silver; all the hangings of the rooms were rose and silver, while silver lamps swung from the ceiling, giving out perfume as they burned. It was a home fit for an imperial bride.

On the 26th Sabretasche gave a fête at the Dilcoosha, a day to be spent, according to Violet's progamme, so that, as she said, "she might catch a glimpse of the Summer, and forget the Season for an hour or two!" and as the Colonel's Dilcoosha was known to afford, if anything could, the requisites for enjoying a long day, no one, even the most *ennuyé*, was bored at the prospect, especially as his invitations were invariably very exclusive, and I know people who would rush into that quarter where is written—

Lasciate ogne speranza, o voi ch'entrate,

if the admissions were exclusive; and would decline Paradise if its golden gates were opened to the multitude!

The luncheon was gay and brilliant; repartee flowed with the still Aï, and mots sparkled with the Johannisberg. Sabretasche showed nowhere to better advantage than as a host; his Chesterfield courtesy, his graceful urbanity, his careful attention to everybody, and every trifle; above all, his art in starting conversation and drawing people out, always made parties at his house more charming than at any other.

During the luncheon De Vigne sat next to Leila Pufidoff, who, as I have before hinted, was willing to make

more love to him than Granville cared to make to her. De Vigne was much set upon by fine ladies, and she flirted with him desperately during the luncheon, and made him row her on the river afterwards, part of the grounds of the Dilcoosha sloping downwards to the Thames, and drooping their willow and larch boughs into the water. De Vigne took the sculls, as in duty bound, and rowed her a good way down, under the arching branches; but though Lady Puffdoff put out all her charms, she could not lure him into anything as warm or tender as she would have liked; she was piqued—possibly what he wished to make her—bid him scull her back to the Dilcoosha, and, as soon as she was landed, went off to listen to Gardoni, with Crowndiamonds, Castleton's eldest brother. De Vigne was profoundly thankful to be released; he had a fancy to leave all these people and scenes, which were so stale, and go where his heart inclined him, go and see Alma Tressillian.

He knew the way by the river to St. Crucis; took the oars of the little boat which the Countess had just vacated, and pulled himself up Thames to a point where he knew a path that led to the farm-house, as he had once or twice walked down to the bank with Alma by it, and rowed her a mile, or so on the water, amused with *her* amusement in seeing those steamers, barges, and cockle-shell boats in which Cockneys love to disport themselves on that unodoriferous stream.

He moored the boat to the bank, thinking of the careless days when he had pulled up the river with the Eton Eight, enjoying the glories of success at the Brocas and Little Surley; and walked onwards to St. Crucis, with that swinging cavalry step which had beaten many good pedestrians and stalwart mountain guides in both hemispheres. He strode along, too, to uneasy thoughts; he was conscious of a keener desire to see the Little Tressillian than he would confess to himself, and, at the same time, he had a remorseful conviction that it might be better to stay away, a suggestion to which he was equally reluctant to listen. A quarter of an hour brought him in sight of St. Crucis; but with that sight he saw, too—Curly, who had apparently forsaken the Dilcoosha for the same purpose as himself. Curly had just pushed open the gate and entered, as if he liked his destination; and De Vigne paused a moment be-

hind him, under the road-side trees, wavering in his mind whether he should follow him or not. Where he stood he could see the garden, in all its untrained profuse summer beauty; the great chesnuts, with their snowy blossoms, that the wind was scattering over the turf beneath; and under the trees he saw Alma, and beside her, bending eagerly forward, Vane Castleton! He, too, then, had left Sabretasche's fête to find his way after Alma. "Curse the fellow!" swore De Vigne, in his teeth, "how dare he come after her?" If he had followed his instinct, he would have taken Castleton up by his coat-collar and kicked him out of the garden like a dog; though probably, for that matter, Castleton had as much right there as himself.

Curly had pushed open the gate and entered, and Alma, catching sight of him as he went across the garden, sprang up, left Castleton rather unceremoniously, and came to meet him with a glad greeting, and something of that gay, bright smile which De Vigne liked to consider his own and his unshared property. Curly answered it with an air more tender than mere compliment, and sat down beside her, giving Castleton such a glance as a man only gives to a rival who has forestalled him.

De Vigne took in the whole scene at a glance, and construed it, as his scepticism and his knowledge of women suggested to him. The darker passions of his character rose up; the venom of jealousy entered into him again.

"She is a thorough-paced coquette, like all the rest," he thought. "I will not add another to the fools who pander to her vanity."

He swung round and retraced his steps, leaving Alma sitting under her chesnut with Castleton and Curly. It cut him to the soul that those men should be near her, teaching her the power, and, with the power, the artifices of her sex, gaining—who could say they would not, one or other of them?—their way into her heart! He was mad with himself for the jealousy he felt; and fiercely and futilely he tried to persuade himself, tried till at last he succeeded, that it was but his regret at the inevitable fate which would await Boughton Tressillian's adopted child if she listened to the love of Castleton, or even of Curly; for Curly, though frankhearted and honourable as a man could be, was young, wild, and held women lightly.

All the fire which lay asleep under the armour of ice which he had put on to guard himself from a sex that had wronged him, was stirred and kindled into flame. He might as yet seek to give them, and to conceal them to himself under, other names, but at work within were his old foes—jealousy and passion. The gay glitter of society, as he joined a group under the fragrant limes of the Dilcoosha, where Violet, Madame de la Vieillecour, and others were competing in skill as Toxophilites for the prizes Sabretasche had rifled from Howell and James's stores, seemed strangely at variance with the tempest working up in his heart; and while he laughed and jested with the women there, he could not forget for one instant the Little Tressillian, as he left her smiling on those men! It was a far greater relief to him than he would own to himself, when not long afterwards he saw Castleton discussing the merits and demerits of her bow with Ela Ashburnington; and in half an hour's time, or a trifle more, heard Curly chatting frothy badinage with Mrs. Tite Delafield; though, following the dictate of his nature, there was no bodily injury he could not have found it in his heart to wreak upon them both, even on his own Frestonhills pet, for having won those gay bright smiles under the chesnuts at St. Crucis.

He would scarcely have been less wrathful if he had heard Crowndiamonds saying to his brother,

"Where the deuce have you been to, Vane? Helena sent me to look for you, but I couldn't find you anywhere."

"I was after something far prettier than the old woman," was Castleton's graceful reply.

"Helena" was nobody less than my Lady Molyneux, with whom this noble scion of the House of Tiara had been *lié* in a closer friendship than Jockey Jack would have relished had he not been taught to take such friendships as matters of course.

"I have been to see that little girl Tressillian—called to look at her pictures, of course; studios are deuced nice excuse, by Jove!"

And Lord Vane curled his whiskers and laughed at some joke not wholly explained.

"What, that little thing who was at Helena's last night," asked Crowndiamonds, "that you and the other fellows

made such a fuss about? Heaven knows why! She's too petite for me. Besides, somebody said she was De Vigne's property!"

"What if she were? If he don't take care of his own, other men may poach it, mayn't they?"

Meanwhile that summer day passed away in colours to Violet as glorious as those that tinged its evening sky when the sun went down behind the limes. Bright as the western light were her present and her future; secure she dreamed from the grey twilight or the starless night, which overshadow the brightest human life, not less surely than they overtake the fairest summer day. Of twilight taint, much less of midnight shadow, Violet knew no fear. I have never seen on earth—not even imagined in song nor idealised in art—any face so expressive of brilliant youth as hers. When it was in repose there was the light of a smile on her lips; and the joyousness of the spirit within seemed to linger far down in the sunny depths of her eyes, as on the violet waves of the Mediterranean we have seen the gleam and the glow of the rays from a sunrise hidden from our view. There was something in her face that touched the most cynical amongst us, and subdued the most supercilious or systematic of all those women of the world into a vague regret for the spring time of their days, when they, too, were in their golden hours, and they, too, believed in Love and Life.

Never had Violet given freer rein to the joyous spirits of her nature than on that day; never had he more completely surrendered himself to the new happiness he had won! He loved her with a strangely tender love. He loved her, as we love very rarely, for

> As those who dote on odours pluck the flowers,
> And place them on their breast, but place to die;
> Thus the frail beings we should fondly cherish
> Are laid within our bosoms but to perish!

He loved her *better* than himself.

"Ah! Violet, Time has leaden wings!" he whispered to her as, when they escaped unnoticed from the crowd, he led her through her own apartments, locked to the ingress of others. "A fortnight is not long, yet to me, while it keeps you from me, it seems eternity! Would to God you were mine now!"

The soft hue that wavered in her cheeks, the low sigh, love's tenderest interpreter, that parted her lips, re-echoed his wish, though words were silent!

"You will love me thus always, Vivian," she whispered, "never less tenderly, never less warmly, never calmly, chilly, as men learn, they say, to love women whom they have won?"

"Never, my own love! Calm, chill affections were death to me as to you. My love has ever been as warm as my native Southern suns; for you it will be as eternal."

"Then what can part us?" murmured Violet, lifting her face to his, with a smile upon her lips, and in her eyes the joy secure from all terror and all tarnish. "No power on earth! And so well do we love, that if death took one, he would strike the other!"

"Hush!" whispered Sabretasche fondly. "Why speak of death or sorrow, my dearest? Our fate is life and joy; and life and joy together! We love; and in that world all happiness earth can know is given to us both."

He paused and the silence that is sweeter than any words supplied his broken words—cold interpreters at best of the heart's most eloquent utterances.

When all his other guests had left the Dilcoosha, Lady Molyneux gave him the third seat in her carriage back to town. The summer dawn was very bright and still, with not a trace of human life abroad, save in some gardeners' carts wending their way slowly to Covent Garden with their fresh pile of newly-gathered vegetables or fragrant load of nodding hothouse flowers—flowers destined to wither in the soft, cruel hand of some jewelled beauty, or droop and die, pining for their native sunlight, under the smoke-shroud of the Great City, as sweet natures and warm hearts shrink or harden, under the blight of a chill world, or the pressure of an uncongenial existence. There was no sign of human life, but the birds were lifting up sweet gushes of natural song, the dew was among the daisied grass, and the southerly wind was tossing the wayside boughs up in its play, and filling the air with a fragrance, brought miles and miles on its rapid wings from the free, fresh woodlands far away.

There was a soft beauty in the summer dawn that chimed sweet cadence with their thoughts as Violet and Sabretasche drove homewards; while Lady Molyneux—worked through-

out the season for fashion's sake as hard as Hood's poor shirt-maker for very life—slept, though she would have denied it, tranquilly and well. They enjoyed the sweet day-break as people do whose hearts are full of gladness; she, with that love of all fair things and that susceptibility to externals natural to youth and to a heart which has never yet known care; he, with that poetic keenness to all things in life and nature which had in boyhood made the mere murmur of the Mediterranean waves, or the setting of the sun, or the sighing of winds among the olive-groves, pleasure to his senses. When the future is fair to us, how fair looks the green and laughing earth!

And she looked up in her lover's eyes

"Oh, Vivian, how beautiful is life!"

"With love!"

Life and love were both beautiful to him as he whispered a farewell but for a few hours in Violet's ear, bent his head for one soft hurried kiss from the lips whose caresses were consecrated to him, and descended from the carriage at the door of his house in Park-lane.

It was past six o'clock when he reached his home, and threw himself down on one of the couches of that favourite room of his on the ground-floor, which adjoined and opened into his studio, where the morning light fell full on his easel, on a portrait of Violet in pastel. He lay smoking his narghilé with that voluptuous indolence habitual to him—looking at the picture where his own art had recreated the beauty of his young love—feeling in memory the loving, lingering touch of her lips—and dreaming over that fresh happiness whose solitary reveries were dearer to him now than society or sleep.

His life had never seemed so sweet, the peace he had won so perfect; and when his servant rapped gently at the door, though infinitely too sweet-tempered, and, truth to tell, too lazy, to irritate himself about trifles, he was annoyed to be disturbed.

"I told you not to interrupt me till I rang for my chocolate"

"I beg your pardon, Colonel," answered his man, submissively. "I should not, but there is a person asking to see you upon business, and as he said it was of great importance, I did not know, sir, what would be best to do."

"What is always best to do is to obey me to the letter—you can never be wrong then. The person could have waited. What is his name?"

"He would not give it, sir; he wished to see you."

"I see no one before two o'clock in the day. Go tell him so."

The man obeyed; but in a minute or two he returned.

"The gentleman will take no denial, Colonel. He begs you to see him."

"What an impertinent fellow!" said Sabretasche, with surprise. "Tell him I will *not* see him, that is sufficient. I see no one who does not send in his card."

"But, sir—but——"

"Well, what? Speak out," said Sabretasche, irritated at the disturbance. It seemed to let in the disagreeables of outer life.

"But, sir, he says his business concerns you, and—and Miss Molyneux, sir."

The man hesitated—even servants living with Sabretasche caught something of his delicacy and refinement, and he knew intuitively how the mention of her name would annoy his master. A flush of astonishment and anger rose over Sabretasche's forehead. He was but too sensitive over Violet, perhaps, from what he considered as the deep disgrace of his first marriage, and he almost disliked to hear servants' lips breathe his idol's name. "Show him in," he said briefly, signing the man away. His past had been too fateful for him to join in Violet's cloudless and fearless trust in the future. One of the bitterest curses of sorrow is the *fear* that it leaves behind it; making us, with the sweetest cup to our lips, dread the unseen hand that will dash it down, hanging the funeral pall of the past over the most glittering bridal clothes of the present, and poisoning the sunshine that lies before us with the memory of those clouds which, having so often come before, must, it seems to us, come yet again.

When sorrow has once been upon us, we have no longer faith in life—we have but Hope, and Hope, God-given as she is, is but fearful, and fluttering, and evanescent at her best.

He lay still; the sunlight falling upon him and upon the brilliant face on the easel at his side. Vulgar and cruel

eyes looked in on the scene—at the luxurious and beautiful studio, where every trifle was a gem of art, and at the man with all his grace and beauty, all his delicate and artistic surroundings: and a vulgar and cruel mind gloated with delight on the desolation and torture it had power to introduce into that peaceful life. Sabretasche lifted his eyes indolently—as he did so the slight flush upon his face died away; he grew pallid as death. For he saw the man who was linked with his hours of greatest shame, of most bitter misery—the brother and the emissary of his faithless wife! Involuntarily he rose, fascinated by the sight of the man connected with the deepest wrong and greatest shame of his life; and the Italian looked at him with a smile that showed his glittering white teeth, as a hound, who has seized the noblest of Highland royals at bay, shows his in the cruel struggle.

"Signor Castrone, this is a very unexpected intrusion," said Sabretasche, in Italian, with all the loathing that he felt for this scoundrel who had stooped to live upon gold wrung from the husband whom his own sister had wronged. "Your negotiations with me are at an end. Allow me to request you to withdraw."

"Wait one moment, Signor Sabretasche," answered the Neapolitan, with a cunning leer in his bright, sharp eyes. "*Are* our negotiations at an end?"

"So entirely, that if you do not leave my presence I shall be compelled to bid my servants make you."

The Italian laughed. The cold, contemptuous tone stung him, and gave him but the greater *gusto* for his task.

"Not so fast, buon' amico, not so fast; we are brothers-in-law, remember! It would not do for us to quarrel."

The blood crimsoned Sabretasche's face up to his very temples.

"The tie you dare to mention, and appeal to *ought* to be your bitterest disgrace. Since you are dead to shame, I need feel none for you; and if you do not leave the room, my servants will compel you."

"Per fede!" said the Italian, with a scoffing laugh. "You will scarcely call your household in to witness your connection with me. They can hear the secret if you choose; it matters nothing to me; only I fancied that now, of all times, you would rather have kept it under

hand. You are going to be married, caro, I heard, to a lovely English aristocrat—is it so?"

Sabretasche answered nothing, but stretched out his hand to the bell-handle in the wall nearest him. He felt it was beneath him to bandy words with such a man as Giuseppe da' Castrone, who, a sort of gentlemanlike lazzarone, half swindler, half idler, a Southern *Bohémien*, had lived on his wits till he had lost all the traces of better feeling with which he perhaps might have begun life. He touched Sabretasche's wrist as the Colonel's white, slender hand was approaching the bell. Sabretasche flung off the grasp as if it had been pollution; but before he could ring the Neapolitan interposed with a smile, half cunning, half malicious.

"Would it not have been wiser, Eccellenza, before you had taken one wife to have made *sure* you had lost the other?"

Despite his nerve and habitual impassiveness, Sabretasche started: a deadly anguish of dread fastened upon him.

"Yours is a very stale device," he said calmly. "Too melodramatic to extort money from me. If you want a few scudi to buy you maccaroni, or game away at dominoes, ask for them in plain words, and I may give you them out of charity."

He stood leaning his arm upon the top of his easel; his tall and graceful figure erect; pride, scorn, loathing written on his features, and in the depths of his eyes; speaking gently and slowly,—but very bitterly!—in his low and silvery voice. The tone, the glance, woke all the malice that slept in the Italian's heart for his sister's high-born and high-souled husband. His eyes glittered like an angry animal's; he dropped the smoother tone which he had used before, for one of coarse and malicious vindictiveness.

"Santa Maria! don't take that proud tone with me, carissimo, or I may make you glad to change it, and turn your threats into prayers! You are not quite so near happiness as you fancy, my fine gentleman. That is your young love's picture, no doubt? Ah! it is a fair face; it will go hard to lose it, I dare say? It would go harder still if the proud, fastidious Vivian Sabretasche were tried for bigamy! It would not look pretty in the London papers, where his name has been so often as a leader of fashion and—"

Before he could end his sentence Sabretasche had sprung at him, rapidly and lightly as a panther, and seized him by the throat:

"Wretch, you lie! How dare you to insult me! By Heaven! if it were not too great honour for you, I would kill you where you stand!"

So fierce was the grasp of his white slender fingers in the passion into which his gentle nature was at length roused, that the Italian, almost throttled, struggled with difficulty from his hold.

"You lie!' said Sabretasche, flinging him off with a force that sent him reeling from him. "The woman whom you dare to recall as my wife is dead!"

"Per Dio, is she? You will find to the contrary, bel signor. Basta! but your hands have no baby's grasp; you had better have joined them in prayer, best brother-in-law. If you marry the English beauty, you will have two wives on your shoulders, and *one* has been more than you have managed!"

Sabretasche's eyes were fixed upon him, fascinated by horror as an antelope by a rattlesnake. "Two wives—two wives!" he muttered incoherently, like a man in delirium. "She is dead, I tell you—she is dead."

Then the sense, and transparent falsity, of what the Neapolitan had said came clearer to his mind, and, with an effort, he regained his calm and haughty tone, speaking slowly between his teeth, "Signor Castrone, once more I will request you, for your own sake, to leave this house quietly, without compelling me to the force I am loth to use. With her, the grave buries all past errors; but with you, I still shall treat as with any other swindler. I am not a likely person to be terrified by secret innuendoes or open insults. This time I will let you go—you are beneath my anger—but if you intrude yourself into this house, or venture to approach me again, I shall call in the law to rid me of a pest."

Something in his voice, which, soft as it was in his native Italian, bore a subtle magic of command, had awed the coarser nature into silence while he spoke; but when he paused, Castrone broke out into a long, discordant, malicious laugh, jarring like jangled bells upon every nerve and chord in his listener's heart.

"Diavolo! buon' amico, it will be I more likely who will have the law upon *you!* Sylvia is alive—alive! and your lawful wife, from whom nothing but death can ever divorce you. I do not think she loves you well enough, milor, to let another woman reign in her stead, without making you pay the heaviest penalty she can, for your double marriage! Wait! you saw the death of a Sylvia da' Castrone in an Italian paper, I dare say? You had the certificate of such a death from Naples? Very possibly, but her aunt Sylvia da' Castrone died last May in Naples, and it was her obituary that you saw. If Sylvia died (as Santa Maria forbid!), it would be recorded as what she is, and what she will be while life lasts—the wife of Vivian Sabretasche. She lives—nay, she is in London, ready to proclaim her right to your name to your new love—or, if your union take place before she can do so, she will then prosecute you according to your English law. She was married in England, you remember; she has not lost the certificate, and the register is correct—I saw it but this morning. It is no idle tale, I tell you, buon' amico. I know you too well to try and palm one off upon you unless I could substantiate it. Your wife is alive, cognato mio! I fear me there will be some few difficulties in the way of marrying your young beauty?"

As the Italian spoke, his coarse, malicious laugh, like the hissing of a serpent, falling like seething fire on the listener's heart, Sabretasche stood gazing upon him. In his parted lips, in his eyes wide open with the horror of amazement, on every feature, already blanched and wan, was marked the deadly anguish of despair—then, as the full meaning of the words he heard cut gradually into his brain, his strength gave way, and he sank down upon his couch, covering his face with his hands, while cold drops of agony stood upon his brow, and a bitter cry broke from the great passion that had grown and strengthened and entwined itself around his heart, till it were easier to drain that heart of its life-blood than its love.

And the Neapolitan stood by, gloating at the ruin he had wrought. He had longed for years to revenge the silent scorn, the cutting contempt, the high-bred hauteur with which the man upon whose gold he had lived had treated him—he had thirsted for the time to come when Sabretasche

should be humbled before him—when it should be his turn to hold the power which could at will remove or let fall the sword that hung above his victim's head—when it should be his to see, writhing in anguish before him, the haughty gentleman at whose glance and whose word he had so often flinched and slunk away. He stood by and watched him, and Sabretasche had forgot all sense of his presence, all memory of the coarse, cruel eyes which looked on the grief of one who so long had persuaded the world that he valued life too little to give it aught but smiles; and Castrone laughed, the laugh of a demon, at his own fell work.

"Milor does not seem charmed to hear of his wife; it does not seem to bring him the connubial rapture one would expect."

The jeer, the taunt, the mockery of his woe, stung to madness the heart of the man who shrank even from the sympathy of friends, and who had oftentimes won the imputation of callousness of feeling because he felt too deeply to bear to unveil his sorrows to the glare of daylight and the sneers of men.

Sabretasche started, as at the sharp touch of the knife searching a fresh wound, and shivered as if with the cold of death. He lifted his face, aged in those brief moments as by long years of woe, and *there* the brother of his wife read desolation enough to satiate a fiend.

"If this were your errand," he said, with effort—and his voice was hollow almost to inarticulateness, "you have no further excuse for intrusion. I shall take means for verifying your story; and now begone, while I can keep my hands off you."

"Here is your proof, Eccellenza!"

Sabretasche mechanically read the paper held out to him; it contained but two lines.

"If you will, you can see me once more to-day;—but only to remind you that while I live no other can call herself your wife."

Though he had not seen it for more than twenty long years, he knew the writing to be his wife's. All hope died in him then; he *knew* that she lived—the woman who had wedded him to misery and disgrace, the woman who now came forward, after the absence and the silence of a score of years, to ban him from the better life to which a gentler and a purer hand was about to lead him.

"I *see* her!" he cried, his passionate anguish, his loathing hatred, breaking out in a rapid rush of words, "I see the woman who disgraced my name, who betrayed my love; who for twenty years has lived upon my gold, yet never addressed to me one word of repentance or remorse; never one word to confess her crimes; never one prayer to ask forgiveness of her sin! I see her! How dares she ask it? How dares she sign herself by the name she has polluted? Go! tell her that I will bribe her no more, that she is free to do her worst that devils can prompt her, that she may proclaim her marriage with me far and wide; I care not! She may write her lying story in all the papers if she will! she may persuade all England and all Italy that she is a fond, deserted wife, and I a cruel, faithless husband; she may bring my name into Law Courts if she chooses to sue me for her maintenance; but tell her, once for all, I give her no more bribes. I disown her, though the world will not divorce me. Now go; go, I tell you, or by God I will not let you leave in peace!"

The fierce but coward nature of the Neapolitan quailed before the passion of the usually gentle and impassive Englishman. He spoke softly, more timidly, smoothing down the coarseness of his tone.

"But signor, listen. If you feel thus toward my poor sister, and will not believe that your hatred to her is without cause, would you not rather that the world knew nothing of your marriage?"

"Since it cannot be broken, all the world may know it. I will bribe you no longer. Begone?"

"Nay, one word—but one word, signor. If I could show you how you might still wed your young English love—"

The fierce gesture of the listener warned him to hasten, if he would be heard; and Castrone's instinct told him how sharper than a dagger's thrust, and more bitter than poison to the man of reserve and refinement, was the rending of the veil of the one sacred temple by a coarse and sacrilegious hand!

"Listen," he said, in his sweet, swift language, with a glitter in his keen, bright eyes. "No one living knows of your union with my sister save ourselves; men do not dream that you are married, much less will they think of

turning over registers for a date of more than twenty years ago. Your young love, her father, her friends, all your circle, need never know your wife is living unless you or Sylvia, or I tell them. If any question ever arose about your first marriage, your word would be amply sufficient. They would never insult a gentleman like Vivian Sabretasche by doubting him and prying into details of his past; Sylvia and I are poor; per Bacco, she has luxurious habits, and I—an Italian who is noble—cannot soil his hands with work! Signor mio, we are as poor as the rats in the Vicaria: and if, as you say, you will not support your wife as you have done hitherto, she must apply to your law for maintenance. She *will* do so, and, basta! it is no more than her rights; had she followed my counsels, she would not have let them lie unasserted so long. But she bids me make you this offer. If you will pay us down ten thousand—it is but a drop in the ocean out of all your wealth—we are very moderate; we will bind ourselves by every oath most sacred in your eyes and ours (and we Catholics keep *our* oaths; we are not blasphemers like your churchmen, who kiss the book in courts and perjure themselves five seconds after!) never to reveal your marriage. You may wed your young English aristocrat; she will never know that another lives who might dispute her title. Men say you love her strangely well—and you are more than half Southern, signor; yours will be no calm and frigid happiness, such as content the cold tame English. You need have no scruple, for, since you say you disown her, whatever the law decree, you must feel as divorced as though men's words had unlocked your fetters, and—per Dio! if a score years' separation is not divorce, in Heaven's sight what *is?* Accept our offer—your marriage is virtually dissolved as though no tie of law existed; and long years of love and happiness await you with the woman you idolise. Refuse it, your marriage will be known all over England; and you will see your English love the wedded wife of some other and some happier-fated man. Choose, signor—the choice is very easy—you who have never hesitated to pay any price for Pleasure, will hardly refuse so small a price for happiness! Choose, signor, you hold the game in your own hands."

With subtle ingenuity, devilish skill, was the temptation

put! The Neapolitan watched the speeding of his poisoned arrows, and saw that they had hit their quarry. Sabreasche leaned against the wall, his lips pressed in to keep down the agony within him to which he would not give vent; a shiver passing over his frame, which was burning with feverish passions; he breathed quick short gasps, as if panting for very life; while his eyes were fixed on that brilliant face, whose loving gaze turned on him from the canvas, tempted him, how fiercely! how pitilessly! as woman's beauty has ever tempted man's honour to its fall.

There on the lifeless easel beamed the fair, fond face, pleading for her joy and his own. Before him stretched two lives; one radiant and blessed, full of the rest for which his heart was weary, the beloved companionship that makes existence of beauty and of value; the other desolate, with no release from the chains that fettered him as the bonds which bound the living man to the dead corpse, no relief from the haunting passions, which would burn within, till stilled in the slumber of the grave! All wooed him to the one; all manhood rebelled against the other!

All urged him to listen to his tempter—all—save the honour, which shrunk from the stain of a Lie. He had paid down all prices save this for pleasure; he would not pay this now, even though the barter were hell for heaven. His eyes were still fastened upon her picture, and there her own answered his—clear, fond, true, even while tempting him his better angel still. He could not win *her* by wrong, woo *her* with deception; he loved her too well to wed her by a fraud, and the knightly soul that slept beneath the worldly exterior of the man of fashion and of pleasure, revolted from the shame of betraying a heart which trusted him, by concealment and by falsehood. He would not give her his name, knowing it was not hers; call her his wife, knowing the title was denied her; live with her day by day, knowing at every moment he had wronged her and deceived her; receive her innocent caresses, with the barrier of that deadly shadow beneath them, which, if she saw it not, could never leave his sight, nor rid him of its haunting presence. Deadly was the temptation — deadly its struggle. Great drops stood upon his brow, his lips turned white as in the agonies of death, his hands clenched as in the combat with some actual foe, and the anguish of his heart broke out in a bitter moan:

"My God! I have no strength for this!"

"Why endure it, then?" whispered the low, subtle voice of the Italian. "Freedom is in your own hands."

But the tempter had lost his power!—the man whom the world said denied himself no pleasure and no wish, and called a heartless and selfish libertine, put aside the joys which could only be bought with Dishonour. Again with the spring of a panther he leapt forward; the blood staining his face, and about his lips a black and ghastly hue as he caught the Italian in his grip:

"Hound! you tempt me to wrong *her!*—take your price!"

He lifted him from the ground with his left hand, opened the door, and threw him down the steps that parted the studio from the corridor. The Italian lay there, stunned with the fall; Sabretasche closed the door upon him, and went in again alone—alone, in what a solitude!

Long hours afterwards he re-issued from his chamber and entered his carriage, drawing down both blinds. A strange silence fell upon his house; many of his servants loved him, through a service of kindness on the one hand, and fidelity on the other, and they knew that some great sorrow had fallen on their master. The footmen in Lowndes-square, accustomed to his entrance, were about to show him unasked, to the room where Violet was; but Sabretasche signed them back, and he went upstairs to her chamber alone. At the door he paused—what wonder? Could his heart but fail him when he was about to quench all radiance from the eyes that took their brightness only from him? to carry the chill of death into a life which had hitherto not known even a passing shade? To say to the woman pledged to be his wife, "I am the husband of another!" It is no exaggeration that he would have gone with thanksgiving to his own grave; life could have no greater bitterness for him than this.

Many moments passed; the time told off by the thick, slow throbs of his heart:—then he opened the door and entered.

She looked up as the handle turned, dropped her book, and sprang forwards, her hands outstretched, her smile full of gladness; not even a trace of long passed shadows on

the fair young brow that had never known care, or sorrow, or remorse. In her joy, not noticing the change upon his face, she welcomed him with fond words and fonder caresses, her arms stealing softly round his neck; and each touch of her lips, to him, like scorching fire.

"Oh, Vivian!" she cried, "you said you would be here four hours ago? You know I don't believe in military duties! *I* should be your only thought."

She looked up in his face as she spoke, and as she did so, her gay smile faded, and the sweet laughter from her eye was quenched in the shadow that already fell upon her from the curse he bore.

"O Heaven! what is it!" she gasped.

He pressed her in his arms. "Hush, hush, or you will kill me."

Then the colour fled from her face; her eyes grew full of pitiful fear and half-conscious anguish, like a startled deer catching the first distant ring of the hunters' feet. She hid her face upon his breast, and clung to him in dread of the unknown horror.

He held her in his arms, as if no earthly power should rend her from him; and his lips quivered with anguish. "I *cannot* tell you—the worst that could happen to us both has come! Would to God that I had died ere I linked your fate to mine!"

Clinging to him more closely, she looked up into his eyes; there she read, or guessed, the truth, and, with a bitter wail, her arms unloosed their clasp, and she sank down from his embrace, lying on the ground in all her delicate beauty, stricken by her great grief, crushed and unconscious, like a broken flower in a tempest.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### HOW A WOMAN WOKE FEUD BETWIXT PALAMON AND ARCITE.

CAN you not fancy how eagerly all town, ever on the *qui vive* after scandal and gossip, darted like the vultures on a dying lion on the story of Vivian Sabretasche's marriage? They were so outraged at its having been so long and care

fully concealed, that those who collected scandals of their neighbours, as industriously and persistently as Paris chiffoniers their rags, grubbing for them often in quite as filthy places, revenged themselves for the wrong he had done them, by telling it, garbled and distorted in every way. Heaven knows through whom it first chiefly spread, whether from the lips of my Lady Molyneux, who hated him and loved the telling, or through his wife and her brother, who probably supplied the *Court Talebearer*, the *St. James's Tittletatler*, and such-like journals, with vague, yet damning, versions that appeared in them, of the "Early history of a Colonel in the Queen's Cavalry, well known in fashionable circles as a dilettante, a *lion*, and a leader of ton, who has recently sought the hand of a beautiful daughter of an Irish Peer, and would have led her to the altar in a few days' time, but for the unhappy, yet, considering the circumstances, fortunate discovery of the existence of a first marriage, concealed by Colonel S. for the space of twenty years; during which period, it is said, the unfortunate wife has lived upon extraneous charity, denied even the ordinary necessities of existence by her unnatural husband, who, having wooed her in a passing caprice, abandoned her when one would have supposed his extreme youth might have preserved him from the barbarity, and we, the moral censors of the age, must say, however reluctantly, villany of such a course!"

How it spread I cannot say. I only know it flew like wildfire. There were many who hated him, and all his "nearest friends" glutted over the story so long hidden from their inquiring eyes. Old dowagers mumbled it over their whist-tables, married beauties whispered it behind their fans, loungers gossiped of it in club-rooms; and in all was the version different. Men in general took his part; but women—the soft-voiced murderers of so much fair fame—sided, without exception, against him; called him villain! betrayer! all the names in their sentimental vocabulary · pitied his "poor dear wife;" doubted not she was a sweet creature sacrificed and thrown away; lamented poor darling Violet's fate, sighed over her infatuation for one against whom they had all warned her, and agreed that such a wretch should be excluded from society!

"I knew it!" said Lady Molyneux, with calm satiric

bitterness, and that air of superiority which people assume when they give you what Madame de Staël wisely terms that singular consolation, "*Je l'avais bien dit!*" "I knew it—I always told you what would come of that engagement—I was always certain what that man really was. To think of my sweet child running such a risk! If the marriage had taken place before this *éclaircissement*, I positively could not have visited my own daughter! Too terrible—too terrible!"

"If it had, Helena," answered her husband, "I think you might have 'visited' poor Vy without disgrace. She would have been, at least, faithful to *one*, which certain stories would say, my lady, you are not always so careful to be!"

The Viscountess deigned no reply to the coarse insinuation, but covered her face in her handkerchief, only repeating:

"I knew it; I knew it all along! If *I* had had my way, Violet would now be the honoured wife of one of the first Peers of the —"

"If you *did* know it, madame," interrupted Jockey Jack sharply—"if you did know poor Sabretasche's wife was alive, it's a pity you did not tell us so. I won't have him blamed; I tell you he's a splendid fellow—a splendid fellow—and the victim of a rascally woman. He can't marry Vy, of course—more fools those who make the laws!—but I won't turn my back on him. He's not the only husband who has very good motives for divorce, though the facts may not be quite clear to satisfy the courts."

With which fling at his wife, Jockey Jack, moved with more or less sympathy from personal motives for his daughter's lover, took his hat and gloves, and barged out of the house, meeting on the door-step the Hon. Lascelles Fainéant who had received that morning in his Albany chambers a delicate missive from his virtuous Viscountess, commencing, "*Ami choisi de mon cœur.*"

So the journals teemed, and the coterie gossiped, of depths they could neither guess at nor understand. Sabretasche's fastidious delicacy could no longer shield him from coarse remark. The marriage which he considered disgrace, the love which he held as the most sacred part of his life, were the themes of London gossip, to be treated

with a jeer, or, at best, with what was far more distasteful to him, pity. Scandal was, however, innocuous to him now; he was blind and deaf to all things, save his own anguish, and that of the woman who loved him.

It was piteous, they tell me, to see the change in Violet under the first grief of her life—and such grief! Such a shock from a bright and laughing future to the utter desolation of a beggared present, has before now unseated intellects not perhaps the weaker for their susceptibility. From wild, disconnected utterances of passionate sorrow she would sink into a silent, voiceless suffering, worse to witness than any tears or laments. She would lie in Sabretasche's arms, with her bright-haired head stricken to the dust, uttering low, plaintive moans that entered his very soul with stabs far keener than the keenest steel; then she would cling to him, lifting her blanched face to his, praying to him never to leave her, or shrink still closer to him, wishing she had died before she had brought sorrow on his head. It must have been a piteous sight—one to ring up from earth to Heaven to claim vengeance against the curse of laws that join hands set dead in wrath against each other, and part hearts formed for each other's joy and linked by holiest love!

It did not induce brain fever, or harm her *so*, belles lectrices. If we went down under every stroke in that way as novelists assume, we should all be loved of Heaven if that love be shown by early graves, as the old Greeks say.

Violet's young life flowed in her veins still purely and strongly under the dead weight that the mind bore. But for a day or so her reason indeed seemed in danger, both were alike perilous to it, her delirous agony or her mute tearless sorrow; and when her mother approached her, pouring in her common-place sympathies, Violet gazed at her with an unconscious look in those eyes, once so radiant with vivid intelligence, which made even Lady Molyneux shudder with a vague terror, and a consciousness of the presence of a grief far beyond her power to cure or calm. Sabretasche alone had influence over her. With miraculous self-command and self-sacrifice, while his own heart was breaking, he calmed himself to calm her; he alone had any power to soothe her, and he would surrender the right to none.

"You had better not see her again," her father said to him one day—"much better not, for both of you. No good can come of it, much harm may. You will not misunderstand me when I say I must put an end to your visits. It gives me intense regret. I have not known you these past months without learning to admire and to esteem you; still, Sabretasche, you can well understand, that for poor Vy's sake—"

"Not see her again?" repeated Sabretasche, with something of his old sneering smile upon his worn, wearied, haggard features. "Are you human, Molyneux, that you say that coldly and calmly to a man who, to win your daughter, would brave death and shame, heaven and hell, yet who loved her better than himself, and would not do her wrong, even to purchase the sole paradise he craves, the sole chance of joy earth will ever again offer him?"

"I know, I know," answered Jockey Jack hastily. "You are a splendid fellow, Sabretasche. I honour you from my soul. I have told my wife so, I would tell any one so. At the same time, it is just *because*, God help you! you have such a passion for poor Vy, that I tell you —and I mean it, too, and I think you must see it yourself —that you had far better not meet each other any more, and, indeed, I cannot, as her father allow it—"

"No?" said Sabretasche, with a sternness and fierceness which Lord Molyneux had never imagined in his nature. "No? You side, then, with those who think, because misfortune has overtaken a man, he must have no mercy shown him. Listen to me! You are taking dangerous measures. I tell you that, so well does Violet love me, that I have but to say to her, 'Take pity on me, and give yourself to me,' and I could make her leave you and her mother, her country and her friends, and follow me wherever I chose to lead her. If I exert my power over her, I believe that no authority of yours can or will keep her from me. It is not your word, nor society's dictum, that holds me back; it is solely and entirely because, young, pure-hearted, devoted as she is, I will not wrong her trust in me, by turning it to my own desires. I will not let my passions blind me to what is right to her. I will not woo her in her youth to a path which, in maturer years, she might live to regret, and long to retrace. I will *not* do it. If I have not spared any

other women in my life, I will spare her. But, at the same time, I will not be parted from her utterly; I will not be compelled to forsake her in the hour of suffering I have brought upon her. As long as she loves me, I will not entirely surrender her to you or to any other man. You judge rightly; I *dare* not be with her long. God help me! I should have no strength. A field is open now to every soldier; if my Corps had not been ordered out, I should have exchanged, and gone on active service. My death would be the happiest thing for her; dead, I might be forgotten and—replaced; but for our farewell, eternal as it may be, I will choose my own hour. No man shall dictate or interfere between myself and Violet, who now *ought* to be—so near to one another!"

Sternly and passionately as he had spoken, his lips quivered, his voice sank to a hoarse whisper, and he turned his head away from the gaze of his fellow-man. The honest heart of blunt, simple, obtuse Jockey Jack stirred for once into sympathy with the susceptible, sensitive, passionate nature beside him. He was silent for a moment, revolving in his mind the strange problem of this deep and tender love his daughter had awakened, musing over a character so unlike his own, so far above any with which he had come in contact. Then he stretched out his hand with a sudden impulse:

"Have your own way, you are right enough. I put more faith in your honour than in bars and bolts. If you love Violet thus, I can't say you shall not see her; her heart's nigh broken as it is. God help you both! I'll trust you with her as I would myself!"

I think Sabretasche had pledged himself to more than he could have fulfilled. It would have been beyond the strength of man to have seen her brilliant and laughing eyes heavy with tears wrung from her heart's depths, her head, with its wealth of chesnut hair, bowed and bent with the weight of an anguish too great to bear; to have heard the low moan with which she would lie for hours on the cushions of her boudoir, like a summer rose snapped off in the fury of a tempest—to have been tortured with the touch of her hands clinging to him, with the wild entreaties to him not to leave her, with her words in calmer moments promising eternal fidelity to him, and vowing to keep true to him,

true as though she were his wife—it had been more than the strength of man to have endured all this, and kept his word so constantly in sight as never to whisper to her of possible joy, never to woo her to a forbidden future.

He *did* keep it, with iron nerve and giant self-subjection, wonderful indeed in one, born in the voluptuous south, and accustomed to an existence, if of most refined, still of most complete, self-indulgence. He did keep it, though his heart would have broken—if hearts did break—in the agony crowded into those few brief days. Had his torture lasted longer, I doubt if he would have borne up against it; for, strong as his honour was, his love was stronger still. But the English and French troops were gathering in the East; months before, the Guards had tramped through London streets in the grey of the morning, with their band playing their old cheery tunes, and their Queen wishing them God speed. For several months in Woolwich Dockyards transports had been filling and ships weighing anchor, and decks crowding with line on line of troops. Already through England, after a forty years' peace, the military spirit of the nation had awoke; the trumpet-call rang through the country sounding far away through the length and breadth of the land, arousing the slumbering embers of war that had slept since Waterloo; already bitter partings were taking place in stately English homes, and by lowly farmstead hearths; and young gallant blood warmed for the strife, longing for the struggle to come, and knowing nothing of the deadly work of privation and disease, waiting and chafing, and dying off under inaction, that was to be their doom. Ours were ordered to the Crimea with but a fortnight's time for preparation; where sharp work was to be done, the Dashers were pretty sure to be in request. We were glad enough to catch a glimpse of active service and real life, after long years of dawdling in London drawing-rooms, and boring ourselves with the routine of pleasures of which we had long tired. We had plenty to do in the few days' notice; fresh harness, fresh horses, new rifles, and old liaisons; cases of Bass and Cognac; partings with fair women; buying in camp furniture; burning the souvenirs of half-a-dozen seasons; the young ones thinking of Moore and Byron, the Bosphorus and veiled Haidées—we of Turkish tobacco, Syrian stallions, Miniés, and Long Enfields. We had all

plenty to do, and the Crimea came to us as a good bit of fun, to take the place that year of the Western Highlands, the English open, or yachting up to Norway or through the Levant.

"Colonel Brandling wishes to speak to you, Major," said his man to De Vigne, one morning when Granville was dressing, after exercising his troop up at Wormwood Scrubs.

"Colonel Brandling? Ask him if he'd mind coming up to me here, if he's in a hurry," answered De Vigne. He did not bear Curly the greatest good-will since seeing him under the chesnut-trees at St. Crucis—where, by the way, he himself had not been since.

"May I come in, old fellow?" asked Curly's voice at the door.

"Certainly. You are an early visitor, Curly," said De Vigne, rather curtly. "I thought you'd prefer coming up here instead of waiting ten minutes while I washed my hands and put my myself en bourgeois."

"Yes, I have come early," began Curly, so abstractedly, that De Vigne swung round, and noticed with astonishment that his light-hearted Frestonhills pet seemed strangely down in the mouth. Curly was distrait and absent: he looked worried, and there were dark circles beneath his eyes as of a man who has passed the night tossing on his bed to painful thoughts.

"What's the matter, Curly?" asked De Vigne, "Has Heliotrope gone lame, Lord Ormolu turned crusty, Eudoxie Lemaire deserted you, or what is it?"

Curly smiled, but very sadly.

"Nothing new; I have made a fool of myself, that's all."

"And are come to me for auricular confession? What is the matter, Curly?"

"Imprimis, I have asked a woman to be my wife," answered Curly, with a nervous laugh, playing with the bouquet bottles on the table.

De Vigne started perceptibly; he looked up with a rapid glance of interrogation, but he did not speak, except a rather haughty and impatient "Indeed!"

Curly did not notice his manner, he was too ill at ease too thoroughly absorbed in his own thoughts, too entirely at a loss, for the first time in his life, how to express what

he wanted to say. Curly had often come to De Vigne with the embarrassments and difficulties of his life: when he had dropped more over the Oaks than he knew exactly how to pay, or entangled himself where a tigress grip held him tighter than he relished; but there are other things that a man cannot so readily say to another.

"Well!" said De Vigne, impatient at his silence, and more anxious, perhaps, than he would have allowed to hear the end of these confessions. "Certainly the step shows no great wisdom. Who has bewitched you into it?"

"You can guess, I should say."

"Not I; I am no Œdipus; and of all riddles, men's folly with women is the hardest to read."

"Yet you might. Who can be with her and resist her—"

"Her?—who? Speak intelligibly, Curly," said De Vigne, irritably. "Remember your lover's raptures are Arabic to me."

"In a word then," said Curly hurriedly, "I love Alma Tressillian, and I have told her so."

De Vigne's eyebrows contracted, his lips turned pale, and he set them into a hard straight line, as I have seen him when suffering severe physical pain.

"She has accepted you, of course?"

Had Curly been less preoccupied, he must have thought how huskily and coldly the question was spoken.

Curly shook his head.

"No?" exclaimed De Vigne, his eyes lighting up from their haughty impassibility into passionate eagerness.

"No! Plenty of women have loved me, too; yet when I am more in earnest than I ever was, I can awaken no response. I love her very dearly, Heaven knows. I would give her my name, my rank, my riches, were they a thousand times greater than they are. Good Heavens! it seems very bitter that love like mine should count for nothing, when other men, only seeking to gratify their passions or gain their own selfish ends, win all before them."

His voice trembled as he spoke! his gay and careless spirits were beaten down; for the first time in his bright butterfly life Sorrow had come upon him. Its touch is death, and its breath the chill air of the charnel-house, even when we have had it by us waking and sleeping, in our bed and at our board, peopling our solitude and poisoning our

Falernian, rising with the morning sun and with the evening stars;—how much heavier then must be the iron hand, how much more chill its breath, ice cold as the air of a grave, to one who has never known its presence!

> Wer nie sein Brod mit Thränen ass,
> Wer nicht die kummervollen Nächte
> Auf seinem Bette weinend sass,
> Der kennt auch nicht ihr himmlischen Mächte.

Curly's voice trembled; he leaned his arm on the dressing-table, and his head upon his hand; his rejection had cut him more keenly to the heart than he cared another man should see. De Vigne stood still, an eager gladness in his eyes, a faint flush of colour on his face, his heart beating freely and his pulses throbbing quickly; that vehement and exultant joy of which his nature was capable, stirred in him at the thought of Curly's rejection. We never know how we value a thing till its loss is threatened!

He did not answer for some moments; then he laid his hand on Curly's shoulder with that old gentleness he had always used to his old Frestonhills favourite.

"Dear old fellow, it *is* hard. I am very—"

He stopped abruptly, he would have added, "sorry for you," but De Vigne knew that he was *not* sorry in his heart, and the innate truth that was in the man checked the lie that conventionality would have pardoned.

Curly threw off his hand and started to his feet. Something in De Vigne's tone struck on his lover's keen senses with a suspicion that before had never crossed him, absorbed as he had been in his own love for the Little Tressillian, and his own hopes and fears for his favour in her eyes.

"Spare yourself the falsehood," he said, coldly as *he* had never spoken before to his idolized "senior pupil." "Commiseration from a rival is simply insult."

"A rival?" repeated De Vigne, that fiery blood of his always ready—too ready, at times—to rise up in anger.

"Yes, and a successful one, perhaps," said Curly, as hotly, for at the sting of jealousy the sweetest temper can turn into hate. "You could not say on your honour, De Vigne, that my rejection by her gives you pain. If you did your face would belie you! You love her as well as I; you are jealous over her; perhaps you have already taken advantage of her youth and her ignorance of the world and her

trust in you, to sacrifice her to your own inconstant passions—"

"Silence!" said De Vigne fiercely. "Your very supposition is an insult to my honour."

"Do you care nothing for her, then?"

The dark blood of his race rose over De Vigne's forehead; his eyes lighted; he looked like a lion longing to spring upon his foe. *He* to have his heart probed rudely like this —to endure to have his dearest secrets dragged to daylight —*he* to be questioned, counselled, arraigned in accusation by another man! Curly had forgotten his character, or he would have hardly thought to gain his secret by provocation and condemnation. De Vigne restrained his anger only by a mighty effort of will, and he threw back his hand with that gesture, habitually expressive with him of contemptuous irritation.

"If you come here to cross-question me, you were singularly unwise. I am not very likely to be patient under such treatment. Whatever my feelings might be on any subject of the kind, do you suppose it is probable I should confide them to you?"

So haughtily careless was his tone, that Curly, catching at straws as men in love will do, began to hope that De Vigne, cold and cynical as he had been to women ever since his fatal marriage, might, after all, be indifferent to his protégée.

"If it be an insult to your honour, then," he said eagerly, "to hint that you love her, or think of her otherwise than as a sister, you can have no objection to do for me what I came to ask of you."

"What is that?" asked De Vigne coldly. He could not forgive Curly any of his words; if he resented the accusation of loving Alma, because it startled him into consciousness of what he had been unwilling to admit to himself, he resented still more the supposition that he cared for Alma as a sister, since it involved the deduction that she might love him—as a brother!—And that fraternal calmness of affection ill chimed in with an impetuous nature that knew few shades between hate and love, between profound indifference or entire possession!

"Alma rejected me!" answered poor Curly; all the unconscious dignity of sorrow was lent to his still girlish and

Greek-like beauty, and a sadness strangely calm and deep for his gay insouciant character had settled in his blue eyes. "I offered her what few men would have thought it necessary to offer her, unprotected as she is. Yet she rejected me, though gently and tenderly, for she has nothing harsh in her. But sometimes we know a woman's refusal is not positive. I thought that perhaps (you have great influence over her) you could put this before her; persuade her at the least not to deny me all hope; plead my cause with her: ask her to let me wait? If it were even as long as Jacob for Rachel, I would bear it. I would try to be more worthy of her, to make her fonder of me. I would shake off the idleness and uselessness of my present life. I would gain a name that would do her honour. I would do anything, everything, if *only* she would give me hope!"

He spoke fervently and earnestly; pale as death with the love that brought no joy! his delicate girlish face stamped pitifully with the anguish of uncontrollable anxiety, yet with a new nobility upon it from the chivalric honour and high devotedness which Alma had awakened in him.

He was silent—and De Vigne as well. De Vigne leaned against one of the windows of his bedroom, his face turned away from Curly, and his eyes fixed on the gay street below. Curly's words stirred him strangely; they revealed his own heart to him; they contrasted with such love as he had always known; they stung him with the thought, how much better sheltered from the storms of passion and the chill blasts of the world in Curly's bosom than in his own, would be this fragile and soft-winged little dove, now coveted by both.

Curly repeated his question in low tones.

"De Vigne, will you do it? Will you plead my cause with her? If she be so little to you, it will cost you nothing?"

Again he did not answer, the question struck too closely home. It woke up in all its force the passion which had before slumbered in some unconsciousness. When asked to give her to another, he learned how dear she was to him himself. Hot and jealous by nature as a Southern, how could *he* plead with her to give the joys to his rival of which a cruel fate had robbed him? how could *he* give the woman he would win for himself, away to the arms of another?

"Answer me, De Vigne. Yes or no?"

"No!"

And haughtily calm as the response was, in his heart went up a bitter cry, "God help me. I *cannot?*"

"Then you love her, and have lied!"

De Vigne sprang forward like a tiger at the hiss of the murderous and cowardly bullet that has roused him from his lair; the fire of just anger now burned in his dark eyes, and his teeth were set like a man who holds his vengeance with difficulty in check. Involuntarily he lifted his right arm; another man he would have struck down at his feet for that dastard word. But with an effort—how great only those who knew his nature could appreciate—he held his anger in, as he would have held a chafing and fiery horse with iron hand upon its reins.

"Your love has maddened you, or you would scarcely have dared to use that word to me. If I did not pity you, and if I had not liked you since you were a little fair-faced boy, I should make you answer for that insult in other ways than speech. If I *were* to love any woman, what right have you to dictate to me my actions or dispute my will? You might know of old that I suffer no man's interference with me and mine."

"I have no power to dispute your will," interrupted Curly, "nor to arrest your actions. Would to Heaven I had! But as a man who loves her truly and honourably himself, I will tell you, whether I have a right or no, that no prevarication on your part hides from me that you at least share my madness. I will tell you, too, though you slew me to-morrow for it, that she is too pure to be made the plaything of your fickle passions, and cast off when you are weary of her face, and seek a newer mistress. I will tell you that the man who wrongs her trust in him, and betrays her guileless frankness, will carry a sin in his bosom greater than Cain's fratricide. I will tell you that, if you go on as you have done from day to day concealing your marriage, yet knitting her heart to yours—if you do not at once reveal your history to her, and leave her free to act for herself, to love you or to leave you, to save herself from you, or to sacrifice herself for you, as she please, that for all your unstained name and unsuspected honour, *I* shall call you a coward!"

"My God!" muttered De Vigne, "that I should live to hear another man speak such words to me. I wonder I do not kill you where you stand!"

*I* wonder, too, he kept down his wrath even to the point he did, for De Vigne's nature had no trace of the lamb in it, and to attack his honour was a worse crime than to attack his life. Deadly passion was between those two men then, sweeping away all ancient memories of boyish days, all gentler touches of brighter hours and kinder communion. Their eyes met—fierce, steady, full of fire, and love, and hate; De Vigne's hand clenched harder on his breast, and with the other he signed him to the door. The wildest passions were at war within him; his instinct thirsted to revenge the first insult he had ever known, yet his kingly soul at the daring that defiled him yielded something like that knightly admiration with which the Thirty looked upon the Thirty when the sun went down on Carnac.

"Go—go! I honour you for your defence of her, but such words as have passed between us, no blood can wash out, nor after words efface!"

Curly bent his head and left him; he had done all he could. When they met again—! Ah! God knows if our meetings were foreseen, many voices would be softer, many farewells warmer, many lips that smile would quiver, many eyes that laugh would linger long with salt tears in them, many hands would never quit their clasp that touch another with light careless grasp, at partings where no prescience warns, no second-sight can guide!

Curly left him, and De Vigne threw himself into an arm-chair, all the fiery thoughts roused in him beating like the strong pinions of chained eagles. The passions which had already cost him so much, and which from his fatal marriage-day he had vowed should never regain their Circean hold upon him, were now let loose, and rioted in his heart. He knew that he loved, as he had sworn to himself never to love woman, that the honour and the pride on which he had piqued himself had been futile to save him from the danger which he had so scornfully derided and recklessly provoked; that his own iron-will, on which he had so fearlessly relied, had been powerless to hold him back from the old intoxication, whose fiery draught had poisoned him even in its sweetness, and to whose delirium he had vowed never again to succumb.

He loved her, and De Vigne was not a man cold enough, or, as the world would phrase it, virtuous enough, to say to the woman he idolised, "Flee from me—society will not smile upon our love." Yet Curly's words had struck into his brain with marks of fire. "Going on as you have done day by day, deceiving her by concealment of your marriage, yet knitting her heart to yours!" These stung him cruelly, for, of all sins, De Vigne abhorred concealment or cowardice; of all men, he was most punctilious in his ideas of truth and honour, and his conscience told him that had he acted straightforwardly, or, for her, wisely, he would have let Alma know in the earliest days of their intimacy of the cruel ties of Church and Law which fettered him with so uncongenial and so unmerited a chain. True, he had never concealed it from bad motives; it was solely his disgust at every thought of the Trefusis, and the semi-oblivion into which—never seeing his wife to remind him of it—the bare fact of his so-called marriage had sunk, which had prevented his revealing it. He had never thought the matter would be of consequence to her; he had looked on her as a mere acquaintance, and it had no more occurred to him to tell her his history, than it had done to talk it over in the clubs. The imputation of want of candour, of lacking to a young girl the honour he had been ever so scrupulous in yielding to men, stung him, however, to the quick. Other words, too, lingered on his mind, bringing with them keen, sharp pain. The doubt whether his love was returned was to him like the bitterness of death. It *should* not have been, we know, had he been unselfish as he ought; he *should* have prayed for punishment to fall upon his head; and for her to be spared the fruits of his own imprudence; but what man amongst us can put his hand upon his heart, and say before God that he could have summoned up such unselfishness under such a temptation? Not I—not you—not Granville de Vigne, for, as Sabretasche would have said, we are unhappily mortal, mon ami!

One resolution he made amidst the whirl of thoughts and feelings which the stormy scene with Curly had so unexpectedly called into life—that was to tell her of his marriage at once. Perhaps there mingled with it some thought that by Alma's reception of it, he would see how little or how much she cared for him. I know not; if there were I

dare throw no stone at him. How many of my motives—how many of yours—of any man's, are unmixed and undefiled? He resolved to tell her, to be cold and guarded with her, to let her see no sign or shadow of the passion she had awakened. All his past warnings had failed to teach him wisdom; he still trusted in his own strength, still believed his will powerful enough to hold his love down without word or token of it, while it gnawed at his heart-strings in the very presence of the woman who had awakened it! Once more De Vigne had gone down before his old foe and siren, Passion; like Sisera before the treacherous wife of Heber the Kenite, at her feet he bowed and fell.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE ORDEAL BY FIRE.

THERE was the beauty of the "summer time" in the fragrant air, and on the moistened roads, and on the rich green woodlands, but it never reached his eyes or heart as De Vigne rode to Richmond, spurring his horse into a mad gallop, with that one world within him which blinds a man to all the rest of earth. He galloped on and on, never slackening his pace; for the first time in all his soldier's life he felt *dread*—dread of telling the woman he loved, that he was tied to the woman he hated! His pulse throbbed and his heart beat loudly as he came in sight of the farmhouse of St. Crucis, and saw coming out of the little gate, and taking his horse's bridle off the post—Vane Castleton.

"Good Heavens!" thought De Vigne, with a deadly anguish tightening at his heart; "is she, then, like the rest? Has she duped us all? Is her guileless frankness as great a lie as other women's artifice?"

Castleton did not see him; he threw himself across his bay, and rode down the opposite road. De Vigne wavered a moment; sceptical as he was, he was almost ready to turn his horse's head and leave her, never to see her again. If she chose Castleton, let him have her! But love conquered;

the girl's face had grown too dear to him for him of his own act never to look upon it again. He flung his bridle over the gate, pushed the little wicket open, and entered the garden. In the window, with her eyes lifted upwards to a lark singing far above in the blue ether, the chesnut-boughs hanging over her in their dark green framework, the honeysuckles and china roses bending down till they touched her shining golden hair; her cheeks a little flushed, was Alma. At the sight of her he trembled like a woman with the passion that had grown silently up and ripened into such sudden force. How *could* he give her up to any living man? Right or wrong, how could he so tame down his inborn nature as to wish to win from such a woman only the calm, chill affection of a sister?

That mad jealousy which had awoke in all its fire at the sight of Castleton, and the suspicion that it was for Castleton's sake and not for his own that she had rejected Curly's suit, drove all memory of the Trefusis, all recollection of what he came to avow to Alma, from his mind!

He stood and looked at her—the rush of that delirium, half rapture and half suffering, which, for long years, none of her sex had had the power to rouse in him, told him that he should not dare to trust himself in her presence, for no will, however strong, could have strength enough to tame its fever down and chill his veins into ice-water. Still he lingered, not master of himself. The man's nature, alive and vigorous, rebelled against the stoicism he had thought to graft upon it, and flung off the cold and alien bonds of the chill philosophy circumstances had taught him to adopt. His heart was made for passionate joys; and against reason it demanded its rights and clamoured for freedom. He lingered there loth—who can marvel?—to close upon himself the golden gates of a fuller, sweeter, more glorious existence; and turn away to bear an unmerited curse alone—a wanderer from that Eden which was his right and heritage as a man. He lingered—then she looked up and saw him, her lips parted with a low, glad cry, the rose flush deepened in her cheeks, the first blush she had ever given for him. She sprang down from the window, which was scarcely a foot above the ground, ran across the lawn as lightly as a fawn, and stood by his side.

"Oh, Sir Folko! how long you have been away!"

How could he leave her then?

She came and stood by him; her golden hair nearly touching his arm, her fingers still on his hand, her glad beaming face turned up to his with the full glow of the afternoon sunshine upon it. She stood by him, only thinking of her happiness at seeing him, never dreaming of the torture her presence was to him—a torment yet an ecstasy, like the exultation and the awakening of an opium-smoker combined in one. Seeing her thus, with her hand in his, her eyes looking upwards to him, so near to her that he could count every breath that parted her soft warm lips, it was hard for him to keep stern and cold to her, repress the words that hung upon his lips, chain down the impulse that rose in him with irresistible longing to take her to his heart, and carry her far away where no man could touch her, and no false laws deny him the love that was his common birthright among men.

"What a long time you have been away?" began Alma again. "Ten whole days! Have you been out of town?"

"Oh no;" said De Vigne, moving towards the house without looking at her.

"Then why have you been so long?"

"I have been engaged, and you have had plenty of other visitors," he answered, his jealousy of Vane Castleton working up into a bitterness he could not wholly conceal.

She coloured. Looking aside at her, he saw the flush in her cheeks. She had never looked confused before at any words of his, and he put it down, not to his own abruptness, but to the memory of his rival.

"No visitors whom I care for," said Alma, with that pretty petulance which became her so well. "I have told you till I am tired of telling you that nobody makes up, or ever could make up, to me for your absence!"

"Still, when I am absent," he said with that satire which with him was often a veil to very deep feeling, "you can console yourself very agreeably with other men?"

They had now passed into her room. He leaned against the side of the window, playing impatiently with sprays of the honeysuckle and clematis that hung round it, snapping the sprays and throwing the fragrant flowers recklessly on the grass outside the sill, careless of the ruin of beauty he was causing. She stood opposite to him, stroking the

parrot's scarlet crest unconsciously—she and her bird making a brilliant picture.

"If I thought so," she answered quickly, "I should not honour the woman I suspected by any visits at all, were I you."

"Is that a hint to me to leave your new friend Castleton the monopoly?" asked De Vigne, between his teeth.

"Sir Folko!"

That was all she deigned to answer—her eyes flashing fire in their dark-blue depths, her cheeks hot as the crimson roses above her head, her expressive lips full of tremulous indignation, her attitude, all fire and grace and outraged pride, said the rest.

"Would you try to make me believe, then, that you do not know that Castleton loves you?" asked De Vigne fiercely.

Alma's cheeks glowed to a warmer crimson still, and resentment at his tone flashed from under her dark lashes, like azure lightning. He had put *her* passions up now.

"You must be mad to speak to me in that tone! I bear no imputation of a falsehood even from you. I do not suppose Lord Vane loves me, as you phrase it! That he flatters me, and would talk more foolish nonsense still, I know."

"You will be very unwise if you give ear or weight to his 'foolish nonsense;' many a girl, as young and as fair as you, has been ruined by listening to it," interrupted De Vigne. He was so mad that Vane Castleton should even have dreamt that he would win her; he was so rife with passions wild and reckless, that rather than stand calmly by the girl, he must upbraid her; and the storm that was in his heart found vent in cruel and sarcastic words, being denied the softer and natural outlet of love vows and fond caresses. The love that murdered Desdemona, and condemned Heloise to a living death, is not dead in the world yet. "Castleton *can* love, not as you idealise it, perhaps, but as he holds it. There is no man so brutal, so heartless, or so egotistical, but can love—as he translates the word, at least—for his own private ends or selfish gratification. 'Love' is men's amusement, like horse-racing, or gaming, or drinking, and you would not find that 'bad men' abstain from it—rather the contrary, I am afraid! Castleton will

love you, I dare say, if you let him, very dearly—for a month or two!"

Alma gazed at him, her large eyes wide open, like a startled gazelle's, her cheeks crimson with the blush his manner and his subject awoke.

"Sir Folko, what has come to you? *Are* you mad?"

"Perhaps," said De Vigne, between his teeth. "All I say is, that you are unwise to receive Castleton's visits and listen to his flattering compliments. Many women have rued them."

"Sir Folko! What right have you to speak to me like this?" interrupted Alma, with a passionate gesture. "What right have you to suppose that I should stoop to Vane Castleton, or any other man? If you had listened to me you would have heard that his fulsome compliments are detestable to me, that I hate them and loathe them, that I told him so this very afternoon, and that I shall have strangely mistaken him if ever he repeats his visits here again. Would you wish to give me over to your friend? Would you think so meanly of me as to—Oh, Heaven forgive you!"

She stood beside him passionate as a little Pythoness, with all the fervour of her moiety of Italian nature awoke and aroused; her cheeks crimson with her indignation, her grief, and her vehemence, her lips just parted with their rush of words, her head thrown back in defiance, her hands clenched together, and in her large brilliant eyes inexpressible tenderness, reproach, and wistful agony. Her gaze was fixed upon him even while her heart heaved with the new emotions his words had aroused; and tears rose in her throat and gathered in her eyes—those tears of blood, the tears of woman's love. All his passions surged up in De Vigne's heart with resistless force; that love which had crept into his heart with such insidious stealth, and burst into such sudden flame but a few hours before, mastered and conquered him. In her strange and brilliant fascination, in her fond and childlike frankness, in her newly-dawned and impassioned tenderness she stood before him. Will, power, reason, self-control were shivered to the winds, he was no statue of clay, no sculptured god of stone to resist such fierce temptation—to pass over and reject all for which nature and manhood, and tenderness pleaded—to put away

with unshaken hand the love for which every fibre of his being yearned!

She stood before him in all her witchery of dawning womanhood, and before her De Vigne's strength bowed down and fell; the love within him wrestled with and overthrew him; every nerve of his frame thrilled and throbbed, every vein seemed turned to fire; he seized her in his arms where she stood, he crushed her slight form against his heart in an embrace long and close enough for a farewell while he covered her flushed cheeks and soft warm lips with "lava kisses melting while they burned." He needed no words to tell him he was loved; between them now there was an eloquence compared to which all speech is dumb.

Those moments of deep rapture passed uncounted by De Vigne, conscious only of that ecstasy of which he had been robbed so long, which was to his heart as the flowing of water-springs through a dry land; all the outer world was forgotten by him, all his unnatural and cruel ties faded from his memory; all he remembered was—that he loved and was loved! Holding her still in his arms he leaned against the side of the window, the soft summer wind fanning their brows, flushed with their mutual joy; his passion spending itself in broken sighs and deep delight, and hurried words and fond caresses.

"You love me, Alma?" he whispered eagerly.

"How could I choose but love you?"

"My God! Would to Heaven I could reward you for it!"

Alma, who knew not his meaning, looked up with a smile, half shy, half mournful, yet inexpressibly beautiful, with its frank gladness and deep tenderness.

"Ah, what reward is there like your love?"

De Vigne kissed her lips to silence; he dared not listen to the eloquence that lured him in its unconscious innocence with such fierce temptation. For, now that the first moments of wild rapture had passed, came the memory of his marriage, of his resolves, of his duty, shown him by a much younger, and in such matters equally latitudinarian a man, and acknowledged to himself by reason and honour, justice and generosity; of his right to tell her fully and freely of the fetters that held him, and the woman whom Law decreed to be, though heart and nature refused ever to acknowledge

as, his wife. All these rushed on him, and stood between him and his new-won heaven, as we have seen the dark and spectral shadow of the Hartz Mountains rise up, cold and grim, between us and the sweet rose-hued dawn which is breaking over the hills and valleys, and chatting away with its golden glories, the poisonous shades and shapes of night.

He had no power to end with his own hand this fresh and glorious existence which had opened before him. If he had ended with absinthe or with laudanum his own life, men would have prosed sermons over him, and printed his condemnation in glaring letters; yet, alas! for charity or judgment, they would have condemned him equally because he shrank from this far worse and more cruel self-murder—the assassination of joy, the suicide of the soul. By Heaven, men need be gods to conform to all the laws of men! We must love life so well, that when it is at its darkest, its loneliest, brimful with misery, bitter and poisonous as hemlock, we must never, in our hardest hours of solitude, feel for an instant tempted to flee from its fret and anguish to the silent sleep of the tomb. Yet—we must love it so little, that when it smiles the sweetest, when it is fair as the dawn and generous as the sunshine, when it has led us from the dark and pestilent gloom of a charnel-house back to a laughing and joyous earth, when it has turned our tears into smiles, our sorrows into joy, our solitude into a heaven of delight, *then* with an unhesitating hand we are to put aside the glorious cup of life, and turn away, without one backward glance, from our loved Eden into the land of darkness, of silence, and of tears. Alas! if God be as harsh to us as man is to his fellow men!

"How well do you love me, Alma?" he said abruptly, as they sat beside the open bay-window, his arms round her, her head leaning against his breast, and on her face the flush of joy too deep to last.

"How well do I love you?" she repeated, with her old, arch, amused smile playing round her lips. "Tell me, first, how many petals there are in those roses, how many leaves on the chesnut-boughs, how many feathers in that butterfly's wings—then perhaps I may tell you how well I love you, Sir Folko!"

De Vigne could not but smile at the poetry and en-

thusiasm of the reply—so like Alma herself; but as he smiled he sighed impatiently.

"I am 'Sir Folko' no longer, Alma; the name was never appropriate. I have always told you I am no stainless knight. Call me Granville. I have no one to give me the old familiar name now."

"Granville!" murmured Alma, repeating the name to herself, with a deeper flush on her cheeks. "Granville! Yes it is a beautiful name, and I love it because it is yours; yet I love Sir Folko best because others have called you Granville before me, but 'Sir Folko' is all my own!"

Her innocent speech stung him to the heart; he remembered how truth, and honour, and justice demanded of him to tell her *who* had "called him Granville before her."

He interrupted her hastily.

"But you have not answered my question. How much do you love me? Come tell me!"

"How *can* I tell you?" she answered, looking up in his face with a smile so tender that it was almost mournful. "It seems to me that no one could ever have loved as I do you. How much do I love you? Oh! I will tell you when you number the rose-leaves or count the river waves, then, but not till then, could I ever gauge my love for you!"

He pressed her closer to him, yet he asked a cruel question:

"But if I left you now—if I were ordered on foreign service, for instance, and died in battle, could you not find fresh happiness without me?"

She clung to him, all her radiant joy banished, her face white and her eyes wild with a prescient dread:

"Oh! why do you torture me so? such jests are cruel! I do not tell you I would die for you, that is a hackneyed phrase not fit for deep and earnest love like ours, though, Heaven knows, existence would be no sacrifice if given up to serve you; but I would live for you—I *will* live for you as no woman ever lived for man. I will increase all talents God has given me that you may be prouder of me; I will try and root out all my faults, that you may love me better. If ever you lose your wealth, as rich men have done, I will work for you, and glory in my task. To share the pomp of others would be misery, to share your poverty, joy. I will

pray to Heaven that I may always be beautiful in your eyes; but if you ever love another, do not tell me, but kill me, as Alarcos slew his wife; to lose my life would be sweeter than to lose your love. If war calls you, I will follow death—and danger would have no terror by your side—and if you died in battle, I would be truer to you, till we met beyond the grave, than woman ever was to any living love. But—my God! you *know* how well I love you; why do you torture me thus!"

She had spoken with all that impassioned fervour natural to her, but passion so intense treads close on anguish; all the soft bloom of youth and joy forsook her lips, and her head drooped upon her bosom, which heaved with uncontrollable sobs. Poor child! they were the first of those waters of Marah which flow side by side with the hot springs of passion. De Vigne pressed her to his heart, lifted her face to his, and called back life to her cheeks with breathless caresses, as if he would repay with that mute eloquence the love which touched him too deeply for her to answer it in words. It struck far down into his heart, this generous and high-souled tenderness. All its devotion and heroism; all its unselfishness, and warmth, and trust; all the diviner essence which breathed in it, marking it out from man's and woman's ordinary loves, brutal on the one side, exigeant and egotistical on the other; struck home to his better nature and there came upon him a mortal anguish of regret and shame that here he should give nothing, but gain all. In those few hours she had grown unutterably dear to him, though, save a few murmured and feverish words, his passions were too strong to form themselves to speech. But one other question he put to her:

"Darling, if you love me like this, would you be content with me for your sole companion, away from the pleasures of society, alone in a solitude of the heart? For me, with me, could you bear the world's sneers? With the warmth of love around you, would you care what the world said of you? Should I be sufficient for you, if others look coldly and neglected you?"

Even now his literal meaning did not occur to her; she neither knew nor dreamt of any ties that bound him; and she still thought he was trying to see how little or how much she loved him.

"Why do you ask me?" she said, almost impatiently, her eyes growing dark and humid with her great love for him. "You know well enough that 'for you,' and 'with you,' are talismans all-powerful with me. Your smile is my sole joy, your coldness my sole sorrow. You are all the world to me; why *will* you doubt me?"

"I do *not* doubt you! It would be better for you if your love were less true, or mine more worthy it. Would to God we had met earlier!"

But she did not hear his muttered words, nor see the hot tears that stood in his eyes; tears wrung from his very heart's depths; tears of gratitude, regret, remorse, and wholly of tenderness, as he bent over her, pressing his burning lips to her flushed brow and soft cheeks, warm with a feverish glow, the glow of joy, predestined not to last.

And now the sun was near his setting, and all the earth was brilliant with the imperial glories that attend the gorgeous burial of a summer-day. Mingling rays of crimson and of gold stretched across the sky, steeping in light the snow-white fleecy clouds that rose up on the horizon, like the silvery mountain range of some far-off and Arcadian land. The roses glowed a deeper hue, the chesnut-boughs drooped nearer to the earth; the flowers hung their heads, drunk with the evening dew: the birds were rocked by the warm west wind; delicious odour from the lime-leaves filled the air, while already on the warm and radiant day descended the tender and voluptuous night.

The sunset hour, when the busy day still lingers on the earth, bowed down with the weight of sins and sorrows with which in one brief twelve hours the sons of men have laden her; and the night sweeps down with noiseless wing from heaven, to lay her soft hand on weary human eyes, and lead them into dream-land, to rest awhile from toil and care; is ever full of Nature's deepest poetry. The working man at sunset, leaves his plough and his hard toil for daily bread, and catches one glimpse of God's great mystery of beauty, as he sees the evening dew glisten in the dying buds of the flowers his plough has slain. The Ave Maria at sunset, wings its solemn chant over the woods and mountains, golden in God's own light, and mingles its

human worship with the pure voiceless prayer of the fair earth. The soil of man at sunset, shakes off the dust of the working world, and with its rest has time to listen to the sweeter under-notes and more spiritual harmonies which lie under the rushing current of our outer life; and at sunset, our hearts grow tenderer to those we hate, and more awake to all the silent beauty of existence which our strife, and fret, and follies mar and ruin; and—when we love—as the warm sunset fades, and the dreamy night draws on, all the poetry and passion that lie in us wake from their slumber, and our heart throbs with its subtle and voluptuous beauty.

The golden rays of the sun, while it still lingered over the earth, as a lover loth to part, fell upon Alma's hair, and lit up her features with a strange radiance, touching the lips and cheeks into a richer glow, and darkening her eyes into a still deeper brilliance. They were silent; they needed no words between them, a whisper now and then was all; their thoughts were better uttered by the caresses he lavished upon her, in the vehemence of his new-born love. The dangerous spell of the hour stole upon them; her soft arms were round his neck; his lips rested on her flushed brow; while one hand played with a thick silky lock of her golden hair which had escaped from the rest and hung down to her waist, twisting it round his fingers and drawing it out, half in admiration of its beauty, half in absence of thought. And as the sun sank out of sight below the horizon, and the little crescent of the moon rose clearer in the evening mists, and the air grew sweeter with the perfume of the early night, Alma might have known that the heart on which her young head rested, was throbbing loudly with fiercer and more restless passion than the loving and tender joy which made *her* heart its own unclouded heaven.

And still he had not told her of his marriage; and still he said to himself, "I ought to leave her, but, God forgive me! *I cannot.*"

On their delicious solitude the sound of a horse's hoofs broken suddenly, with the harsh clang and clamour of the outer world. All was so still around Alma's sequestered home, especially in the summer evenings, when the animal life about the farm was at rest, that the unusual sound

brought, by its sudden inroad, the serpent of social life into the solitude of the heart, from which, for a while, all memory of the prying and fretting world had been excluded.

The horse's gallop ceased at the little gate, and the wicket was opened with a clash of its iron latch. De Vigne started, with a vague dread that some one had come to try and rob him of his new-won treasure. The strongest nerves grow highly strung at times; and when the poetry of life wakes in the hearts of men of action, and passion rises up out of their ordinarily calm existence, their whole souls stir with it, as the great seas, that do not move for light showers or low winds, arise at the sound of the tempest, till all nature is awed at their vehemence, and their own lowest depths tremble with the convulsion.

"What is the matter?" whispered Alma, as she saw his eyes straining eagerly to see who the new comer was.

"Nothing, nothing," he answered hastily. He could not tell her that the vague dread upon him (upon him! he who had laughed at every danger, and held his own against every foe) was the terror and the horror of that woman whom the Law called his Wife. He gave a deep sigh of relief as he saw that it was only his own groom, Warren, coming up the path with a note in his hand; but the blood mounted to his forehead in anger at the interruption. With the contradictory waywardness of human nature, while he knew that he should never leave Alma, unless some imperative call aided him to drag himself from her side, he could have found it in his heart to slay the man who would force him, however innocently, from his paradise!

The note was merely from Dunbar, major of Ours, to ask to see him at once, on business of urgent military importance; but as the envelope was marked outside "Immediate," his confidential servant had sent a groom off with it as soon as he had seen it.

De Vigne read the note in silence, only pointing to Alma the words on it, "Let me see you, if possible, early this evening," and sat still, tearing the paper into little pieces, with his teeth set, his face deadly pale, and a bitter struggle in his heart—a struggle more hard and cruel, even than to most men, to one who had followed all his impulses, whose

will had been unbridled from his cradle, with whom to wish and to have had always been synonymous, and whose passions were as strong as renunciation was unaccustomed. With a fierce oath muttered in his teeth, he sprang to his feet; half awed by the sternness on his face, the grey pallor of his cheek, and the flashing fire of his eyes, she took his hands in her own with the caressing fondness of her usual manner.

"Must you go? Can't you give me one half hour more? The hours were always so long when you were away; what will they be now? Give me ten minutes more—just ten minutes!"

Her loving, innocent words, the clinging touch of her hands, the witchery of her face, lifted up to his in the twilight shadows—what tortures they were to him!

"Hush, hush!" he said fiercely, crushing her in a passionate farewell embrace. "Do not ask me; for God's sake, let me go while I can! Kiss me and forgive me, my worshipped darling, for all the sins in my past, and my acts and my thoughts, of which your guileless heart never dreams!"

She did not understand him; she had no clue to the wild desires rioting in his heart; but love taught her the sympathy, experience alone could not have given; her kisses, warm and soft as the touch of rose-leaves, answered his prayer, and her words were fond as human words could be.

"Since I love you, how could I help but forgive you whatever there might be? I do not know what your words mean, but I do know how well I love you; too well to listen to what others might ever say of you; too well to care what your past may have been. Good night! God bless you!"

"God bless you!" murmured De Vigne incoherently. "Let me go, let me go, Alma, while I have strength?" . . .

In another moment the ring of his horse's hoofs rung loud on the stony road, growing fainter and fainter on the evening air, till it died away to silence; while Alma leaned out under the chesnut-boughs, looking up to the stars that were shining in the deep blue sky, now that the golden sunset had faded, with tears of joy on her long black lashes and sighs of delight on her warm lips, dreaming her sweet love idyll, and thinking of the morrow that would bring him to her again.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### A BITTERNESS GREATER THAN DEATH.

As soon as De Vigne reached town he drove to Dunbar's, who in a very few words told him what he wanted of him, which was to exchange with him back into the Dashers, and go out to the Crimea in his stead; but in lieu of the eager assent he had anticipated from so inveterate a campaigner and thorough-bred a soldier, he was astonished to see De Vigne pause, hesitate, and wait irresolute.

"I thought you would like it, old fellow," said Dunbar. "The exchange would be easily effected. I should be no good in the Crimea; the winter season would send me to glory in no time with my confounded bronchia, while you seemed to enjoy yourself so thoroughly out in India, polishing off those black devils, that I thought you'd be delighted to get a chance of active service again."

"I enjoy campaigning; no man more so," said De Vigne shortly; "and to give up a chance of active service is almost as great a sacrifice to me as anything. At the same time, circumstances have arisen which make me doubt whether I can go in your stead or not. Will you give me twenty-four hours to decide?"

"Very well—if you like. I know you will tell me this time to-morrow that you have already ordered your cases of Bass, and looked over your new rifles. You will never be able to resist the combined seductions of Turkish liaisons and Russian spearing," laughed Dunbar.

De Vigne laughed too; though, Heaven knows, laughter was far enough from his heart:

"Very possibly. I'll send you a line to-morrow evening, yes or no."

"Oh, it's sure to be yes," said Dunbar. "You were always the very deuce for war and women, but I think campaigning carried the day."

De Vigne laughed again, par complaisance; but he thought of one woman he had learnt to love more dearly than anything else in earth or heaven. He left Dunbar, went back to his house, and shut himself in his own room. He lit his cigar, opened the window and leaned out into

the night. His honour and his love were at war, and the calm and holy midnight irritated and inflamed, where at another time it might have soothed him. Never in all his life, with its error, its hot instincts, its generous impulses, its haughty honour, never stained by a mean thought, but often hazarded by reckless passions, had his nature been so fairly roused as now. He knew that he had fallen far from his standard of truth and candour, in the concealment of his marriage, which had gone on from day to day till he had won the deepest love he had ever had, ostensibly a free man; and that knowledge cut him to the soul, and gave him the keenest remorse which he had ever known; for though he had done much sin in haste, his conscience was ever tender, and nothing could ever blunt him to any dereliction from frankness and honesty. But he knew, too, now, that the evil was done, and that to leave her would be to quench all the youth and glory from her young days, and refuse her the sole consolation in his power to give her, which was his love, no light treasure to a woman of her mind and nature.

"God help her!" he muttered to himself, as he looked down into the dark and silent street; "I will be truer to her than any husband ever was to wife. She *is* my wife by love, by reason, by right, and when others sneer at her or pass her coldly by because she has sacrificed herself for me, I will atone to her for all—I will give up the world, and live for her alone. Since I have crushed my little flower in my headlong path, I will make up to her by guarding her from all blight or storm. Would to Heaven I were worthy of her!"

That night his resolve was made. To-morrow he would tell her of his marriage—tell her all. If she still loved him, and still wished to live for him, entirely as his heart was bound to the Service, he would throw up his commission and take her to Italy or the Ionian Islands, where he would lavish on her all the luxuries and pleasures wealth could bring, and give her what would be all-sufficient to her affectionate and unselfish nature—love. He would live for her alone; if, in time, he missed the glare and excitement of his past life with men, this sacrifice, in return, he at the least owed her; he would not bring her to the din of cities where coarse glances might pain the heart

that had as yet known no shame, and where coarse judges would class her with the base Floras and Leilas of her sex.

Military duties kept him until late the next day. A soldier's life is not all play, though the foes to a standing army are given to making it out such. Several things called his attention that morning and he had afterwards to attend the first sitting of a court-martial on one of those low practical jokes with which raw boys, bringing their public school vulgarities with them, stigmatize a Service that enrols the best gentlemen, the highest courage, and the most finished chivalry of Europe, whose enemies delightedly pounce on the exception to uphold it as the rule.

The court-martial was not over till between two and three; De Vigne then hastily got unharnessed, and threw himself across his horse. When he had once determined on a thing he never looked back; sometimes it had been better for him if he had. Yet, in the long run, I have known more mischief done by indecision of character than anything else in the world, and he is safe to be the strongest and stoutest-hearted who never looks back, whether he has determined on quitting Sodom or on staying in it. The evil lies in hasty judgment, not in prompt action.

Right or wrong, however, he never *had* looked back in any course. His mind was made up—if Alma still loved him on hearing all—to take her to some southern solitude, and give up his life to her; if she reproached and condemned him, to fight in the Crimea till he fell—and nothing would have stirred either of his resolves. He rode at a gallop from London to Richmond—rode to the fevered thoughts that chased each other through his mind, many of them of bitter pain and sharp stinging regret, for to the man of honour it was no light trial to say to the woman who had trusted him, "I have deceived you!"—some of them of involuntary self-reproach at the memory how little he had merited and fulfilled the trust Boughton Tressillian had placed in him, "as a man who will not misjudge my motives nor wrong my confidence." Yet all fears were crossed, and all remorse silenced, and outweighed by that wild joy of which his nature was capable.

All more gloomy memories vanished, as shadows slink away before the noon, as he came within sight of Alma's home. He pulled up his horse with such abruptness that the beast reared and fell back on his haunches; he threw himself off the saddle with a headlong impetuosity that might have lost him life or limb, flung the bridle over the post, and entered. The morning was grey and wet—strange contrast to the radiant summer night before—the birds were silent, the flowers were snapped off their stems, their scattered petals lying stained and trodden on the moist gravel; his hurried steps stamped the discoloured rose-leaves into the earth, and the dripping chesnut-boughs shook rain drops on him as he passed.

He brushed past the dank bushes in haste, careless, indeed unconscious, of the rain that fell upon him. With all the impatience of his nature he glanced up at the house as he approached. He expected to find her looking out for him, to see her eyes fixed wistfully upon the gate, and to watch the radiance of joy dawn upon her face as she beheld him. He wanted to see that her thoughts and moments were consecrated to him, in his absence as well as his presence, and to have in her joyous welcome and her rapid bound to meet him, sure evidence still of her love.

With a strange, disproportionate anxiety he brushed past the dripping boughs, ran up the steps of her bay-window, pushed open the glass door, and entered. There were her easel, her flowers, her little terrier, Pauline upon her stand pluming her feathers, and congratulating herself on her own beauty, one of his own books, "Notre Dame," open on her low chair, with some moss-roses flung down in a hurry on its leaves; her colours and brushes, and half-finished sketches scattered over the room—but the mistress and queen of it was absent. There was no sweet welcome for him, no loving radiant face uplifted to his, no rapid musical voice to whisper in his ear earnest impassioned words, no soft caresses to linger on his lips, no warm young heart to beat against his own.

He glanced hastily round on the still deserted chamber, then opened the door and called her by her name. The house was low and not large, and he knew she would come at the sound of his voice as a spaniel at his master's call. There was no reply; the building was silent as death, and

his heart beat thickly with a vague and startled dread. He went on to the staircase and repeated her name; still there was no reply. Had she been anywhere in the house, small as it was, he knew she would have heard and answered him. A horrible unexplained fear fastened upon him, and he turned into a dark old-fashioned bedchamber, the door of which stood open, for in its farther window he caught sight of the old woman, her nurse, alone, in her wicker chair, her head covered with her apron, rocking herself to and fro in the silent and querulous grief of age.

It is no metaphor that the beating of his heart stood still as he beheld her grief, which, mute as it was, spoke to him in a hundred hideous suggestions. She started up as his step rang on the bare floor, and wrung her hands, the tears falling down her wrinkled cheeks:

"Oh, sir! oh, sir! my poor young lady—my pretty darling—"

His hand clenched on her arm like an iron vice.

"My God! what has happened?"

"That ever I should live to see the day," moaned the old woman. "That ever I couldn't have died afore it. My pretty dear—my sweet little lady that I nursed on my knee when she was a little laughing—"

His grasp crushed on to her wrist, while his words broke from him inarticulate in his dire agony:

"Answer me—what is it? Where is she? Speak—do you hear?"

The woman heard him, and waved to and fro in the garrulous grief of her years.

"Yes, sir, yes; but I am half crazed. She's gone—my poor dear darling!"

"Gone—*dead?*"

The hue of death itself spread over his face. He let go his hold upon her arm and staggered backwards, all life seeming to cease in the mortal terror of suspense and dread.

"No, sir—no, thank Heaven!" murmured the woman, blind to the agony before her in her own half-fretful sorrow. "Not dead, the pretty dear, though some, I dare say, would sooner see her in her coffin, and sure she might be happier in her grave than she'll be now, poor child!"

The blood rushed back to his brain and heart; his strong

nerves trembled, and he shook in every limb in the anguished agitation of that brief moment which seemed to him a ceaseless eternity of torture. If not dead she could not be lost to him; no human hand had power to take her from his arms!

He seized the garrulous woman in a grasp whose fervency terrified her:

"Where is she then? Speak—in a word—without that senseless babble."

"Yes, sir, yes," sobbed the old nurse, half lost in her quavering sorrow, but terrified at his manner and his tone. "She's gone away, sir, with that soft, lying, purring villain—oh, Lord! what is his name?—that false, silky, girl-faced lord—a duke's son they said he was—who was always hankering after her, and coming to buy pictures, and cared no more for pictures than that cat. She's gone off with him, sir, and he'll no more marry her than he'll marry me; and he'll leave her to starve in some foreign land, and I shall never see her face again. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! sir, you men have much to answer for—"

"She's gone! with *him!*"

If she had not been so wrapped in her own rambling regrets, she must have noticed the unutterable anguish in his hoarse and broken words as he grasped her arm with almost the wild unconscious ferocity of madness.

"Woman, it is a vile plot—a lie! She has been trapped, deceived. She has not gone of her own will!"

"Yes, sir, she is—she's gone of her own mind, her own choice," moaned the old nurse.

"I tell you she did *not*—it is a lie," swore De Vigne. "He has stolen her, tricked her, fooled her away. It is a lie, I tell you, and you have been bribed to forge it. He has decoyed her away, and employed you for his accomplice, to pass this tale on me. My God! if you do not acknowledge the truth I will find a way to make you!"

Terrified at his violence the old woman shook with fear, tears falling down her pale and withered cheeks.

"I tell you truth, sir—before Heaven I do. Do you think *I* should injure her, my pretty little lady, that I've loved like my own child ever since my poor master brought her from foreign lands, a little, lisping, golden-haired thing? Do you think I should join in a plot against her, when I've

loved her all her life? Don't you think, sir, I'd be the first to screen her and the last to blame her? I tell you the truth, sir, and it breaks my heart in the telling. She went of her own free will, and nothing could stop her. She must have planned it all with him yesterday when he was here the cruel villain! I knew he didn't come after them pictures; but I never thought Miss Alma would come to *this*. She went of her own will, sir, she did—indeed! Lord Vane's carriage came here between twelve and one this morning; not him in it, but his valet, and he asked straight for Miss Tressillian, and said he had a message for her, and went in to give it. I thought nothing of it, so many people have been coming and going lately for the pictures; and, indeed, sir, I thought he was your servant, for the man looked like one you used to send here, till my boy, Tom, came in, and said he'd asked the coachman, and the coachman told him his master was the Duke of Tiara's son. The man wasn't there long before I heard Miss Alma run upstairs, and as I went across the passage I see her coming down them, with her little black hat on, and a cloak over her muslin dress; and a queer dread came over me, as it were, for I see her face was flushed, and she'd tears in her eyes, and a wild excited look; and I asked her where she was going. But she didn't seem to hear me; and she brushed past me to where the man was standing. 'I am ready,' she says to him, very excited like; and then I caught hold of her—I couldn't help it, sir—and I said, though I didn't know where or why she was going, 'Don't go, Miss Alma! don't go, my darling!' But she turned her face to me, with her sweet smile—you know her pretty, imperious, impatient ways—'I must, nurse!' and I got hold of her, and kept on saying, 'Don't go, Miss Alma, don't!—tell me *where* you're going, at least—do!—my dear little lady!' But you know, sir, if she's set her heart on a thing, it ain't never easy to set her against it; and there was tears in her eyes. She broke away with that wilfulness she's had ever since she was a little child: 'I cannot stop, nurse—let me go!' and she broke away, as I said, and went down the garden path, sir, the man following after, and she entered Lord Vane's carriage, and the valet got up in front, and they drove away, sir, down the road; and that's the last I ever see of my poor master's darling, Heaven bless her!

and she'll be led into sorrow, and ruin, and shame, and she'll think it's all for love, poor child; and he'll break her heart, and her high proud spirit, and then he'll leave her to beg for her bread; for that bird's better notions of work than she; and a deal fit she is to cope with the world, that's so cold and cruel to them that go against it!" . . . .

But long ere she ceased her garrulous grief, heedless of his presence or his absence in her absorbed sorrow for her lost darling, De Vigne had staggered from the chamber, literally blinded and stunned by the blow he had received. A sick and deadly faintness as after a vital wound stole over him, every shadow of colour faded from his face as on his marriage-day, leaving it a grey and ashy hue even to his very lips; his brain was dizzy with a fiery weight that seemed to press upon it; he felt his way, as if it were dark, into an adjoining room, and sank down upon its single sofa, all the strength of his vigorous manhood broken and cast down by his great agony. How great that agony was Heaven only knew.

He threw back, as a hideous nightmare, the thought that Alma could be false to him; that a girl so young, so frank, so fond, could be so arch an actress; that all those loving words, those sweet caresses, that earnest and impassioned affection lavished on him but a few short hours before, were all a lie. Yet the curse of evidence chimed strangely in; he recalled her blush at his mention of Castleton's name; he remembered that his ex-valet, Raymond, had entered Castleton's service on being discharged from his; the mere circumstance of her having left with anyone, for anywhere, without an explanation, a word, or a message to him—her lover, whom she had parted with so passionately the night before, these alone wrote out her condemnation, and shattered all hope before his eyes.

He sat there in as mortal anguish as man ever knew. If wrong there had been in his acts and his thoughts, it was fearfully and cruelly avenged, and the punishment far outweighed the sin. Across the midnight darkness of his mind gleamed lightning flashes of fiery thoughts. Once he started to his feet—in the delirium of jealousy he swore to find Castleton wherever he had hid, and make him yield her up, or fight for her till one or the other fell. But pride was not all dead in him—nor ever would be while he had life. Since she had gone to another let another keep her!

And now it was that the great faults of De Vigne's nature—hasty doubt and passionate judgment—came out and rose up against him, marring his life once more. That rank scepticism which one betrayal had engrafted on a nature naturally trusting and unsuspicious, never permitted him to pause, to weigh, to reflect; with the rapidity of vehement and jealous passion, from devoted faith in the woman he loved, he turned to hideous disbelief in her, and classed her recklessly and madly with the vilest and the falsest of her sex. Of no avail the thousand memories of Alma's childlike purity and truth, which one moment's thought would have summoned up in her defence; of no avail the fond and noble words spoken to him but the day before, which one moment's recollection would have brought to his mind to vouch for her innocence, and set before him in its vile treachery the plot to which she had fallen victim; —of no avail! Passionate in every impulse, hasty in every judgment, too cruelly stung to remember in his madness any reason or any justice, he seized the very poison that was his death-draught, and grasped a lie as truth.

How long he sat there he never knew; time was a long blank to him; roll on as it might, it could only serve him in so far as it brought him nearer to his grave. His brain was on fire, his thoughts lost in one sharp, stinging agony that had entered into his life never to quit it; he sat there in dull stupor till her little dog, that had followed him up the stairs, and now crouched near him, awed as animals always are at the sight of human suffering, crept up and licked his hand, uttering a long, low whine, as if mourning for the one lost to them both. The touch roused him: how often, in happier days, before the curse of love rose up between them, had he smiled to see her playing like a child with her little terrier! The touch roused him, calling him back to the life charged with such unutterable woe. He lifted his head and looked around; the clouds had rolled away, and the evening sun, bursting out in all its glory, shone with cruel mockery into the little chamber which, as it chanced, was her own room. The lattice windows were open, and the wind swept in, stirring the muslin curtains of the little white bed where, night after night, her blue eyes had closed in sleep, as pure and sweet as a harebell folding itself to slumber. As he gazed around him, at all the trifles

that spoke to him like living things of the woman he had loved and lost, the bitter agony of his soul was greater than he could bear; the fierce tension of his strained nerves gave way, with one cry to Heaven in his mortal anguish, he fell like a drunken man across the little couch, his brow resting on the pillow where her golden head had so often lain in childlike sleep, deep sobs heaving his breast, burning tears forcing themselves from his eyes, tears which seemed to wring his very life-blood from him in their fiery rain, yet tears which saved him in that horrible hour from madness.

* * * * * *

That night he wrote thus briefly to the Major:

"Dear Dunbar,—I desire to exchange with you if it can be effected. There is no time to be lost.

"Yours sincerely,

"G. de V."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE BRIDAL JEWELS GO TO THE MONT DE PIÉTÉ.

In their salon in the Champs Elysées, that crowded, gaudy, and much bedizened room, sat as they had sat twelve months before, old Fantyre and the Trefusis, the old woman huddled up among a pile of cushions, shawls, and furs, with her feet on a *chaufferette*, older and uglier, with her wig awry, and her little piercing black eyes rolling about like a monkey's as she drank her accustomed *demie tasse*, which, as I before observed, looked most suspiciously like cognac undefiled. The younger one, with her coarse, dashing, full-blown, highly tinted beauty not shown off to the best advantage, for it was quite early morning, *madame n'était pas visible*, of course, in common with all Parisiennes, whether Parisienne by birth or by adoption; and not being visible, the Trefusis had not thought it worth her while to dress, but hastily enveloped in a peignoir looked certainly, though she was a fine woman still, not exactly calculated to please any man's taste, used to the sight, and the society, of delicate aristocrates.

"Well, my dear, ain't he killed yet?" demanded old Fantyre, in her liveliest treble.

"No," said the Trefusis, running her eye through the Returns of the 25th October. "Halkett, Nolan, Lord Fitzgibbon—lots of them—but—"

"Not the right one," chuckled the old Fantyre, who, though she had her own private reasons for desiring De Vigne's demise, as his property was so ruled beyond his power that a considerable portion must have come to his wife, had still that exquisite pleasure in the Trefusis's mortification, which better people than the old Viscountess indulge in now and then at their friends' expense. "Deuce take the man! Tiresome creature it is; shot and sabre carry off lots of pretty fellows out there. Why on earth can't they touch him? And that beautiful creature, Vivian Sabretasche, is *he* all right?"

"Slightly wounded—that's all."

"How cross you are, my dear! If you must not wear widow's weeds, I can't help it, can I? They are not becoming, my dear—not at all; though if a woman knows how to manage 'em, she may do a good deal under her crape. Men ain't afraid of a widow as they are of an unmarried woman, though Heaven knows they need be if they knew all; the 'dear departed' 's a capital dodge to secure a new pigeon. Mark my words, my dear, De Vigne won't die just because you wish him!"

"Wish him!" reiterated the Trefusis. "How disagreeably you phrase things, Lady Fantyre!"

"Give 'em their right names, my dear? Yes, I believe that *is* uncommon disagreeable for most people," chuckled the old woman. "In my time, you know, we weren't so particular; if we did naughty things (and we did very many, my dear, almost as many as people do now!), we weren't ashamed to call 'em by their dictionary names. Humbug's a new-fangled thing, as well as a new-fangled word. They say we were coarse; I dont know, I'm sure; I suppose we were; but I know we didn't love things under the rose, and sneak out of 'em in daylight, as you nineteenth-century people do; our men, if they went to the casinoes at night, didn't go to Bible meetings, and Maintenance-of-Immaculate-Society boards, and Regenerated Magdalens' Refuges the next morning—as they do now-a-days. However, if we were more consistent, we weren't so Christian, I suppose! Lor' bless me, what a deal of

cant there is about in the world now; even you, whom I did think was pretty well as unscrupulous as anybody I ever met, won't allow you'd have liked to see De Vigne among them Returns. I know when poor old Fantyre died, Lady Rougepot says to me, 'What a relief, my dear!' and I'm sure I never thought of differing from her for a minute! You've never had but one checkmate in your life, Lucy—with that little girl Trevelyan—Tressillian—what's her name?"

"Little devil!" said the Trefusis bitterly; she had not grown the choicest in her expressions, with constant contact with the Fantyre. "I saw her again the other day."

"Here?"

"Yes; in the Rue Vivienne—in a carriage. I passed her quite close; she knew me again. I could tell that by the scorn there was in her eyes, and the sneer that came on her lips. Little fool! with the marriage certificate before her very eyes, she wouldn't believe the truth. The scheme was so good, it deserved complete success. I hate that little thing—such a child as she looks to have put one down, and outgeneralled one's plans."

"Child!" chuckled old Fantyre; "she wasn't so much of a child but what she could give you one of the best retorts I ever heard. 'It was a pity you didn't learn the semblance of a lady, to support you in the assumption of your rôle!' Vastly good, vastly good; how delighted Selwyn would have been with that!"

"Little devil!" repeated the Trefusis again, "I hate the sight of that girl's great dark-blue eyes. De Vigne shall never see her again if I can help it, little, contemptuous, haughty creature!"

"She is a lady, ain't she?" said the Fantyre drily.

"I'm sure I don't know. She is as proud as a princess, though she's nothing but an artist after all. Good gracious! Who is that?" said the Trefusis, as she heard a ring at the entrance, giving a hurried, dismayed glance at her *négligée*. "It can't be Anatole nor De Brissac; they never come so early."

"If they do, my dear, beauty unadorned, you know—"

"Stuff!" said the Trefusis angrily. "Beauty unadorned would get uncommonly few admirers in these days. Perhaps it's nobody for us."

As she spoke a servant entered, and brought her a piece of paper with a few words on it, unfolded and unsealed,

"What's that, my dear?" asked Lady Fantyre eagerly.

"Only my dressmaker," said the Trefusis, with affected carelessness, but with an uneasy frown, which did not escape the quick old lady.

"Dressmaker?" chuckled the Fantyre, as she was left alone. "If you've any secrets from me, my dear, we shall soon quarrel. I've no objection whatever to living with you as long as you have that poor fellow's two thousand a year, and we can make a tidy little income with you to attract the young men, and me to play whist and écarté with 'em; but if you begin to hold any cards I don't see, I shall throw up the game, though we have played it some time together."

While old Fantyre, who had this single virtue amongst all her vices, that she was candid about them, thus talked to herself over her cognac and coffee, the Trefusis had gone, demie-toilette and all, into the salle, where there awaited her a neat, slight, fair man, with a delicate *badine* and gold studs, who looked something between a valet, an actor, and a would-be-dandy—such as you may see by scores any day on the Boulevards, hanging about the cafés, or lounging in the parterre of the Odéon.

He smiled, a curious slight smile, as the Trefusis entered.

"*Vous voilà, Madame!* Not *en grande tenue* to-day; too early for your pigeons, I suppose? I dare say you and the old lady make a very good thing out of it, though of course you only entertain immaculate society, for fear you should give the Major a chance to bring you up before a certain Law Court, eh?"

"What did you come for so soon again?" demanded the Trefusis abruptly, with as scant courtesy as might be. "I have only five minutes to spare, you had better not waste it in idle talk."

"What do I come for, ma belle? Now, what *should* I come for? What do I ever come for, pray?" returned her visitor, in nowise displeased, but rather amused at her annoyance.

"Money!" retorted the Trefusis. "You will get none to-day."

The man laughed.

"Now why always keep up this little farce? Money I wish for—money you will give me. Why make the same amusing little denial of it every time?"

"It is no amusing little denial to-day, at all events," said the Trefusis, coldly. "I have none left. I cannot give you what I have not."

He laughed, and played a tattoo with the cornelian head of his cane.

"Very well, then I will go to the Major."

"You cannot. He is in the Crimea."

"To the Crimea I can go to-morrow, *belle amie*, in the service of a gentleman who has a fancy to visit it. But I am tired of playing the valet, though it is amusing enough sometimes; and, indeed, as you pay so very badly, I have been thinking of writing to De Vigne; he will give me anything I ask, for any information."

The Trefusis's eyes grew fiercer, but she turned pale and wavered.

"A line of mine will tell the Major, you know, belle amie, and I don't fancy he will be inclined to be very gentle to his wife *née* Lucy Davis, eh?" he went on, amused to watch the changes on her face. "He will pay very highly, too—what are a few thousands to him?—he is as lavish as the winds; as proud as the devil, and hating Mme. sa femme as he does, he will give me, I have no doubt, anything I ask. It will be a much better investment for me; I won't trouble you any more, Lucy; I shall write to your husband at once."

He rose, and took his hat; but the Trefusis interrupted him.

"Stay—wait a moment—how much do you want?"

"Fifty pounds now, and as much this day week?"

"Impossible! I have not half—"

"Glad to hear it, madame. The Major will be the much better paymaster. With his thousands I can get a life annuity, buy stock, take shares, do what I like, even—who knows?—become an eminently respectable member of society! *Adieu! ma belle;* when we next meet it may be in the Law Courts over the water."

"You villain!" began the Trefusis savagely, with a fierce flash of her black eyes.

He laughed:

"Not at all; you have the monopoly of any villany there

may be in the transaction. Adieu! what shall I say from you to the Major—any tender message?"

"Wait," cried the Trefusis hurriedly. "I have five naps—I could let you have more to-morrow; and—you could take one of my bracelets—

"*One!* No, thank you, the other plan will be best for me. I am tired of these instalments, and De Vigne—"

"But my—my diamonds, then—the ceinture he was fool enough to give me—" She tried to speak coldly, but there was a trembling eagerness in her manner which belied her assumed calmness.

"Fool, indeed!—and to think he was a man of the world! Your diamonds!—*ma chère*, you must be in strange fear, indeed, to offer me them. They must be worth no end, or they would not be the Major's giving. Well, come—I am willing to spare you, if I can, for old acquaintance sake."

When he left the house, he carried with him that diamond ceinture worthy of an Empress which De Vigne had bought, in his lover's madness, for his bride ten years before, and took it up to the Mont de Piété. Two thousand a year was not a bad income, but the Trefusis's dress, the Fantyre's wines, the *petits soupers*, and her numerous Paris amusements, ran away with it very fast; and though écarté, vingt-et-un, and whist added considerably to their resources, the Trefusis was very often hard up, as people who have lived on their wits all their lives not unfrequently are. One would fancy such sharpening upon the grindstone of want might teach them economy in prosperity; but I don't think it often does; *canaille* ever glory in the ostentation of money, and waste hundreds in grand dinners, to—grudge the pineapple. Besides, the Trefusis, too, had a drain on her exchequer, of which the world and even Argus-eyed old Fantyre was ignorant.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### IN THE CHERSONESUS.

ÅLLYN and Devno!—those green stretching meadows, those rich dense forests, catching the golden glow of the sunshine of the east—those sloping hill-sides, with the

clematis, and acacia, and wild vine clinging to them, and the laughing waters of lake and stream sleeping at their base—who could believe that horrible pestilential vapour stole up from them, like a murderer in the dark, and breathing fever, ague, and dysentery into the tents of a slumbering Army, stabbed the sleepers while they lay, unconscious of the assassin's hand that was draining away their life and strength? Yet at the very names of Aladyn and Devno rise to memory days of futile longing and weary inaction, of negligence inconceivable, and ennui unutterable, of life spent for the lack of simplest common sense, and graves filled by a schoolboy greed for fruit—such fruit as in such a land was poison, when backed by a mad draught of raki. Days, when forbidden to seek another foe, Englishmen and Frenchmen went down powerless and spiritless before the cholera, which had its deadly grip upon them ere they heard its stealthy step. Days when you could not stroll on the beach, without finding at your feet a corpse, hastily thrust into the loosened sand, for dogs to gnaw and vultures to make their meal, or look across the harbour without seeing some dead body floating, upright and horrible, in the face of the summer sun. Days, when pestilence was abroad through the encampment from Monastir to Varna.

We went out to the Crimea gladly enough; most of us had a sort of indistinct panorama of skirmishes and excitement, of breathless charges and handsome Turkish women, of dangers, difficulties, and good tough struggles, pleasant as sport, but higher spiced; of a dashing, brilliant campaign, where we should taste real life and give hard hits, and win perhaps some honour, and where we should say, "*Si l'on meurt, eh bien, tant pis!*" in the gay words of the merry French bivouac-song. We thought of what our governors or grandsires had done in the Peninsula, and longed to do the same—we did not guess that as different as the bundles of linen, with wrinkled, hideous features, that the Tarters called women, were to the lovely prisoners from the convents of flaming Badajoz, would be the weary, dreary, protracted waiting while the batteries strove to beat in the walls of Sebastopol, to the brilliant and rapid assault by which Ciudad Rodrigo was won! I do not like to write of the Crimea; so many painful memories come up with its very name; memories such as all who were there must have

by the score. Nothing personal prompts my anger; I liked the campaign well enough myself, having one of the very few tents that stood the hurricane, not missing more than nine-tenths of my letters, enjoying the exceptional blessing of something like a coat, and being now and then the happy recipient of a turkey, or some coffee that was *not* ground beans.

I was rewarded as much as any man could expect to be. I have a medal (shared in common with Baltic sailors who never saw the foe, save when securely anchored off Cronstadt), and clasps, like the privates of the Line, though I am not aware that any infantry man was present at the Balaklava charge. I am perfectly content myself, being independent of that very precarious thing "promotion for distinguished services." But when I think of them all, my dead friends, whose bodies lie thick where the sweet wild lavender is blowing over the barren steppes of the Chersonese this summer's day, I remember, wrathfully, how civilians, by their own warm hearths, sat and dictated measures by which whole regiments, starving with cold, sickened and died: and how Indian officers, used to the luxurious style of Eastern warfare and travel, asserted those privations to be "nothing," which they were not called to bear; and I fear—I fear—that England may one day live to want such sons of hers as she let suffer and rot on the barren plains of the Crimea, in such misery as she would shudder to entail on a pauper or a convict.

Few of us will ever forget our first bivouac on the Chersonese soil—that pitiless drenching down-pour of sheets of ink-black water! What a night it was! De Vigne, ever reckless of weather, had not even a blanket to wrap round him, and lay in the puddles of which the morass-like earth was full, with the rain pouring down upon him, while Sabretasche, who had loved to surround himself with all that could lull the senses and shut out the harsher world, passed the night in a storm to which we should not expose a dog, in discomfort for which we should pity a beggar;—yet gave away the only shelter he had, a Highland plaid, to a young boy who had but lately joined, a little fellow with a face as fair as a girl's, and who had barely seen seventeen summers, who was shivering and shuddering with incipient ague.

The stamp of their bitter fate was upon both those men;

the wounds were too deadly and too recent to be yet skinned over; healed they deemed they never would be. How Violet and Sabretasche parted Heaven only knew; no human eyes had pried in upon them in that darkest hour; they had parted on the very day that should have been their marriage day; parted—whether ever to meet again on earth who could tell? His trial was known to all! even his own men, who had admired her fair face when she had driven up to the barracks, had caught some glimmering of it, and there was not one who did not, in his own way, reverence the Colonel's sorrow.

De Vigne was yet more altered than he, and I saw with astonishment all the icy coldness which had grown on him after his fatal marriage, which had of late been dissipated, now closing round him again. I could but guess at the cause, when before the embarkation, I, knowing nothing, had asked him if he had been to bid Alma good-bye; and he had turned on to me, his face white as death, his eyes black as night:

"Never breathe that name to me again!"

I knew him too well to press questions upon him, and I was obliged to be content with my suspicions as to the solution. But I was pained to see the bitter gloom which had gathered round him again too deeply for trouble, danger, excitement, or care of comment, to have any power to dissipate it. He had an impatient, irritable hauteur to his men quite foreign to him, for to his soldiers he had always been invariably considerate; he was much more harsh and stern in his orders, for before he had abhorred anything like martinetism; and there was a settled gloom upon him with which, every now and then, it seemed as if the fiery nature in him were at war, struggling like the flames of a volcano within its prison of ice. From the time he took Dunbar's place as Major of Ours, I never saw him *smile;* but I did see him now and then, when he was sitting smoking in the door of his tent, or riding beside me home from a dog-hunt or a hurdle-race, look across to where the sea lay, with a passionate agony in his eyes. All he seemed to live for was headlong and reckless danger, if he could have it. The thing that roused him the most was when St. Arnaud, Bosquet, Forey, and their staff rode along the front of our columns before Alma, and we were told what the

Marshal said to the 55th, "English, I hope you will fight well to-day!"

"By Heaven!" swore De Vigne fiercely, "if I had been near that fellow, I would have told him we will fight as we fought at Waterloo!"

It was a bitter trial to him, as to us all, that the Cavalry could not do more on the 20th, when we sat in our saddles seeing the serried columns of the Line dash through the hissing waters, red with blood and foaming with the storm of shot, and force their way through the vineyards of the Alma—that little tortuous stream where we tasted blood, for the first time on Crimean soil, whose name, with all his self-command, made De Vigne wince more than a Cossack lance thrust through his side would have done. To have to sit through that day like targets for the Russian's round shots, while their storm of balls tore through our lines, and ripped up our horses, was too quiet business for any of us.

We were weary of inaction; our Arm had had little or nothing to do; we were not allowed to push on the pursuit at Alma, nor the charge at Mackenzie's Farm; we were stung by certain individual sneers that we were "too fine gentlemen for our work," and we were longing to prove that if we were "above our business of collecting supplies for the army," we could, if we had the chance, send home to England such a tale as would show them how cheaply the "fine gentleman" of the Light Cavalry held life when honour claimed it, and would cover our slanderers for ever in the shame of their own lies. And our time came at last, when we were roused by the notes of Boot and Saddle, and drawn up on the slopes behind the redoubts. The story of that day is well enough known in England. How brightly the sun shone that morning, dancing on the blue strip of sea, and flashing on the lines of steel gleaming and bristling below; on the solid masses of the Russians, with their glittering lances and sabres, and their gay accoutred skirmishers whirling before their line of march like swallows in the air; on the fierce-eyed Zouaves lying behind the earthworks; on our Light and Heavy brigades in front of our camp; on Sir Colin's Highlanders drawn up *two deep;* for the 93rd did not need to alter their line even to receive the magnificent charge of the Muscovite cavalry! How brightly the sun shone,—and how breathlessly we waited in that dead

silence, only broken by the clink and the ring of the horses bits and the unsheathing of sabres, as the Russians came up the valley, those splendid masses of cavalry moving en echelon to the attack! Breathless every man on the slopes and in the valley; French and English; soldier and amateur; while the grand line of the Muscovite horse rode on to the 93rd, who quietly awaited them, motionless and impenetrable as granite, firm and invulnerable as their own Highland sea-walls—awaited them, till their second volley, rolling out on the clear morning air, sent that splendid body of horse flying, shivered like sea-foam breaking on a rock. Then came the time for Scarlett and his Heavies—and all the lookers-on gathered up yonder on the heights, held their breath when Greys and Enniskilleners, with the joyous cheer of the one, and the wild shout of the other ringing through the air, rushed at the massive columns of the Russians, charged them, shaking their serried masses as a hurricane shakes the woodland trees, and closing with their second line as it came up to retrieve the lost honour of the priest-blessed lances, mingled pêle-mêle with them, reckless of all odds, cutting their way inch by inch through the dense squadrons closing round them—those "beautiful grey horses" pushing their road with that skill and daring which had once won them Napoleon's admiration—till the 1st Royals, with the 4th and 5th Dragoon Guards, dashed to the rescue, and sent the Russian columns flying over the plain, like a routed herd of cattle without a leader. How the lookers-on cheered, waving their caps in their hands and shouting rapturous applause, till the heights rang again, as the Brigadier and his Heavies rode back from their assault! —and De Vigne muttered, as he glanced down the line of our light brigade:

"By Heaven! when *is* our turn to come?"

Our turn was near at hand. An hour after, we received the order to advance on the Russian guns. With the blame, on whomsoever it may lie of that rash order, I have nothing to do. That vexatious question can never be settled, since he on whose shoulders they placed it lies in the valley of Balaklava, the first who fell, and cannot raise his voice to reply, or give the lie, if it be a lie, to his calumniators. If Louis Nolan were to blame, his love for our Arm, and his jealousy over its honour, his belief that Light Cavalr-

would do the work of demigods, and his irritation that hitherto we had not been given the opportunity we might have had, must plead his excuse; and I think his brilliant courage, and the memory of that joyous cheer which ended in the wild death-cry which none who heard can ever forget, might silence the angry jar and jangle of contention above his grave, and set the seals of oblivion upon his error!

The order was given us to take the Russian guns. For the first time since we had landed a light of joy and pleasure came into the Colonel's eyes; and his old smile flashed over De Vigne's face. We were so sick of inaction, of riding about the Chersonese doing nothing, and letting other men's names go home in the despatches!

At ten minutes past eleven we of the Light Brigade shook our bridles and dashed off with Cardigan, in the morning sunlight, towards the Russian battery. Lookers-on tell me they could hardly credit that so few in numbers, entirely unsupported, were going to charge an army in position; and that they gave us up for hopless destruction as we swept past them full gallop, the sunshine catching the points of our sabres and flashing off our harness. If they did not credit it, *we* did. We knew it was against all maxims of war for Cavalry to act without support, or infantry at hand. We knew that in all probability few indeed, if any of us, would ever come back from that rapid and deadly ride. But the order was given. There were the guns—and away we went, quickening from trot to canter, and from canter to gallop, as we drew nearer to them. On we went, spurring our horses across the space that divided us from those grim fiery mouths. On we went: Sabretasche's voice cheering us on, and the delicate white hand that Belgravian belles admired pointing to the guns before us: De Vigne sitting down in his saddle as in bygone days, when he led the field across Northampton pastures. On we went. All *I* was conscious of was a feverish exultation; a wild, causeless delight; a fierce tiger-like longing to be at them, and upon them. The ring of the horses' iron hoofs, the chink of the rattling bits, the clashing of chains and sabres, the whistle and screech of the bullets as they flew amongst us from the redoubt, all made music in my ear. God knows how it is, but in such hours

as that the last thing one thinks of is the death so near at hand. Though men reeled from their saddles and fell lifeless to the ground at every step, and riderless chargers fled snorting and wounded from our ranks; though the guns from the redoubt poured on us as we swept past, and volleys of rifles and musketry raked our ranks; though every moment great gaps were made, till the fire broke our first line, and the second had to fill it up; though from the thirty guns before us poured a deadly fire, whose murderous balls fell amongst us as we rode, clearing scores of saddles, sweeping down horses and men, and strewing the plain as we passed with quivering human bodies, and chargers rolling over and over in their death-agony,—on we rode, down into that fiery embrace of smoke and flame, that stretched out its arms and hissed its fell kisses at us from the Russian line. De Vigne spurred his horse into the dense smoke of the blazing batteries as Sabretasche led us in between the guns. Every one was for himself then, as we dashed into the battery and sabred the gunners at their posts, while the oblique fire from the hills, and the direct fire of musketry, poured in upon us. Prodigies of valour were done there, never to be chronicled. Twice through the blinding smoke I saw de Vigne beside me—the Charmed Life, as they had called him in India—reckless of the storm of balls that fell about him, sitting in his saddle as firmly as if he were at a Pytchley run. We had no breathing time to think of others in that desperate struggle, but once I heard Pigott near me shout out, "The Colonel's down!" Thank God it was not true; down he was, to be sure, for his horse was killed under him by a round shot; but he sprang up again in an instant, as collectedly as though he were pacing the Ring in Hyde Park, and vaulted on a riderless charger that was by him. That wild mêlée! I remember nothing distinctly in it, save the mad thirst for blood that at such a time arises in one as savagely as in a beast of prey. A shot struck my left arm, breaking the bone above my wrist; but I was conscious of no pain as we broke through the column of Russian infantry, sending them flying before us, broken and scattered like thistle-down upon the wind, and were returning from our charge, as brilliantly as the Scots and Enniskilleners had returned from theirs, when the flank fire from the hill battery opened upon us—an enemy we

could not reach or silence—and a mass of Russian Lancers were hurled upon our flank. Shewell and his 8th cut through them—we stayed for an encounter, hemmed in on every side, our little handful shrouded by the dense squadrons of their troops. It was hot work, work that strewed the plain with the English Light Brigade, as a harvest-field is strewn with wheat ears ere the sheaves are gathered. But we should have broken through them still, no matter what the odds, for there were deeds of individual daring done in that desperate struggle which would make the chillest blood glow, and the most lethargic listener kindle into admiration. We should have cut through them, *coûte que coûte*, but that horrible volley of grape and canister, on which all Europe has cried shame, poured on friend and foe from the gunners who had fled before our charge, the balls singing with their murderous hiss through the air and falling on the striving mass of human life, where English and Russian fought together, carrying death and destruction with its coward fire into the ranks of both, and stamping the Church-blessed troops of the Czar with ineffaceable infamy.

It was with bitter hearts and deadly thoughts that we, the remnant of the Six Hundred, rode back, leaving the flower of the Light Brigade dead or dying before those murderous Russian guns;—and it was all done, all over, in five-and-twenty minutes—less than a fast up-wind fox-hunt would have taken at home!

De Vigne was unhurt. The Charmed Life must still have had his spell about him, for if any man in the Cavalry had risked danger and courted death that day he had done so; but he rode out of the lines at Balaklava without even a scratch. Sabretasche had been hit by a ball which had only grazed his shoulder; the *raffiné* man of fashion would have laughed at a much more deadly wound. We were not too "fine gentlemen" for *that* work! Days afterwards he looked back to the plain where so many of his Dashers had fallen, torn and mangled in the bloody jaws of those grim batteries, the daring spirits quenched, the vigorous lives spent, the gallant forms become food for the worms, and he turned to De Vigne with a mournful smile, "*Cui bono?*"

True indeed—*Cui bono?* that waste of heroic human life, There was a bitter significance in his favourite sarcasm,

which the potentates, who for their own private ends had drenched the Chersonese in blood, would have found it hard to answer. *Cui bono* indeed? Their bones lie whitening there in the valley of Balaklava; fresh fancies amuse and agitate the nations; the Light Cavalry Charge is coldly criticised and pronounced tomfoolery, and their names are only remembered in the hearts of some few women whose lives were desolation when they fell.

Winter in the Crimea—the Crimea of 1854-55. The very words are enough to bring up again to memory that sharp, stinging wind, of whose concentrated cold none can imagine in the faintest degree, save those who have weathered a winter in tents on the barren steeps before Sebastopol. Writing those very words is enough to bring up before one the bleak, chill, dark stretch of ground, with its horrible roads turned to water-courses, or frozen like miles of broken glass; the slopes, the vast morasses of mud and quagmire, or trackless wastes of snow; the hurricane, wild as a tropical tornado, whirling the tents in mid-air, and turning men and horses roofless into the terrible winter night; the long hours of darkness, of storm, of blinding snow, of howling wind, of pouring ink-black rain, in which the men, in the trenches, and the covering parties and pickets, watched with eyes that must never close, and senses that might never weary; the days when under those pitiless skies officers and men shared alike the common fate, worse clad than a beggar, worse cared for than a cab-horse;—all rise up before one as by incantation, at those mere words, Winter in the Crimea.

My left arm turned out so tedious and tiresome that I was obliged to go down to Balaklava for a short time. The day before I went up again to the front, a transport came into harbour with a reinforcement of the —th from England. I watched them land: their fresh healthy faces, their neat uniforms, their general trim, and all-over-like-going look, contrast enough to the men in the trenches at the front; and as I was looking at them disembark I saw a face I knew well--the face fair and delicate as a girl, with his long light curls and his blue eyes, and his lithe slight figure, of our little Curly of Frestonhills. Twelve months before, Curly had changed from his captaincy in the Coldstreams to the Lieutenant-Colonelcy of the —th, and had

been savage enough at having done so when the Household Brigades went out to the Crimea; but now his turn had come. We met as old friends did meet out there, and had a long haver of the things that had been done in England since we left, and the things we had done ourselves in the Chersonese. Knowing nothing of those fierce words which had passed between Curly and De Vigne, I was surprised at the silence with which Curly listened to my details of the heroic pluck with which our Festonhills hero had cut his way through the Russian squadrons on the morning of the 25th; knowing nothing, either of the love which had entered into them both for the same woman, I set my foot in it unawares by asking him if he had seen the Little Tressillian before he left? Curly, though heaven knows life had seasoned him as it seasons us all, busied himself with poking up his pipe, while the muscles of his lips twitched, as he answered simply, "No?"

"No! What, didn't you even go to bid her good-bye?"

"For Heaven's sake, Arthur, hold your tongue!" said Curly, more sharply than I had ever heard him speak. "It is grossest brutality to jest on such a subject."

"Brutality to ask after the Little Tressillian?" I repeated, in sheer amazement. "My dear fellow, what on earth do you mean? What has happened to Alma? Is she dead?"

"Would to Heaven she were, rather than what they say she is: another added to Vane Castleton's list of victims!"

The anguish in his voice was unmistakable. I stared at him in amazement. The Little Tressillian gone over to Vane Castleton! That girl whose face was truth, and innocence, and candour in itself! I stared at him in mute bewilderment. The bursting of Whistling Dick between us at that moment would not have astonished me more.

"Alma—Vane Castleton! My dear Curly, there must be some mistake."

"God knows!" he answered between his teeth. "I do not credit it, yet there are the facts. She has left St. Crucis; her nurse saw her leave in Castleton's brougham, and she has never returned. She must have been deluded away; she never could have gone willingly. He may have

lured her with a false marriage, God knows. I should have found him out to know the truth, and shot him dead if he had beguiled her away against her will, but I never heard of it until the day before we sailed. I could not leave my regiment at the eleventh hour."

"Do you care so much for her, then?"

"I loved her very dearly," said Curly, simply, with his pipe between his lips. "Don't talk of it again, Arthur, please; she cared nothing for me, but *I* will never believe her face told a lie."

He was silent; and since the loss of Alma had stung him so keenly and so deeply, that not even the elasticity of his gay, light, affectionate nature could rebound or recover from it, it was easy to understand how it had overwhelmed De Vigne, if, as I doubted not, the love that Sabretasche had predicted had come between himself and the Little Tressillian.

The fierce words that had passed between them were not forgotten. De Vigne was not a man to forgive in a moment. Curly, sought no reconciliation. Perhaps he harboured a suspicion that it had been to his friend and not to Castleton, that Alma had flown, for he knew De Vigne would have left the woman he most tenderly loved, at any call to arms. They seldom met—De Vigne being in Lord Lucan's camp, and Curly in that of the Light Division—and they avoided each other by mutual consent. The love of woman had come between them, and stretched like a great gulf between De Vigne and the young fellow he had liked ever since he was a little fair-haired, bright-eyed boy.

Curly came just in time for that grey wintry dawn, when the bells of Sebastopol rang through the dark foggy air, and the dense masses of troops, for whom mass had been said, stole through the falling rain up the heights of the valley of Inkermann.

Curly was in time for Inkermann, and for the winter work in the trenches, where he, so late the Adonis of the Guards, the "best style" in the Park, the darling of Belgravian boudoirs, who at home never began his day till two o'clock, had to turn into the trenches in rain which made the traverses like Dutch dykes, or in blinding snow blown into his eyes; to come back to a tent without fire, to food either semi-raw or else burnt black as a cinder; and to

sleep rudely, roused by a hurricane that whirled away his sole frail shelter, and turned him out into the bitter black Crimean night. That winter showed us campaigning with the gloss off; no brilliant succession of battles, the space between each filled up with the capture of fallen cities and balls and love-making in friendly ones, such as make the history of the war among the green sierras of Spain so favourite a theme for fiction and romance; but nothing save an eternal cannonading from the dawn of one day to the dawn of another; nothing but months dragging away one after another, seeing horses and men dying off by scores.

The weary inactivity of the siege, which weighed down neve the lightest hearts before Sebastopol, was but one long torture to De Vigne, who longed for danger and excitement as the sole anodyne to a passion which pursued him as the Furies pursued Orestes; while Sabretasche, the most luxurious of voluptuaries, bore uncomplainingly the miseries of that Crimean winter. The wild Chersonese hurricane turned him out at night, shelterless, to the full fury of the storm; his food was such as at home he would have forbidden to be given to his dog; his servant had to fight with another for some scanty brushwood to light his fire; loathsome centipedes crawled over his very bed; he had to wade through mud, and rain, and filth, over paths marked out by the sick and dying fallen by the roadside, with the carrion birds whirling aloft over the spot where the corpses lay. Yet I never heard him utter a complaint, except, indeed, when he turned to me with a smile:

"How horrible it is, Arthur, not to be able to wash one's hands!"

One night, just before we were ordered into Balaklava, a friend of his who was staying on board one of the vessels in the harbour was dining with him—De Vigne, a French colonel of cavalry, whom Sabretasche had known in Paris, a man of the —th Lancers, and myself, making up the party. All of us thought of the Colonel's charming dinners in Park-lane as we sat down to this, the best money could procure, and miraculously luxurious for the Crimea—a turkey, some preserved beef, and a little jam, with some brandy and whisky, for which his man had paid a price you would not believe, if I recorded it parole d'honneur.

"I am equally glad to see you, Carlton," said Sabretasche, "but I'm afraid I can't entertain you quite so well as I did in Park-lane. *Il faut manger pour vivre*, else I fancy you would hardly be inclined to touch much of anything we can give you in the Crimea."

"The deuce, Sabretasche! we have what we care for;—our host," said Carlton. "I wonder when we shall have you back among us; I say, you're quite a hero, and so is De Vigne, in England. Lady Puffdoff and scores of your old loves are gone mad about you, and have been working their snowy fingers to the bone over all sorts of wool things for you and the rest of the Dashers, that are now tumbling about in the holds, and will rot in Balaklava harbour, I suppose, till the hot weather comes."

"Hero! Bosh!" said De Vigne, with his most contemptous sneer. "If the people at home would just believe the men are dying away here, more than three thousand sick in camp, and would provide for them with just a little common practical sense, they'd do us more service than by writing ballads about us, and showering epithets on us that they'll forget in twelve months' time, when they are running after some new hobby."

(De Vigne spoke prophetically!)

"But you like campaigning, though you rough it, old fellow?" asked Carlton.

"By George! I should say so! If I were a medical man, and had to deal with hypochondriacs, frenzied poets, nervous *littérateurs*, or worn-out public men, I would send them all off to active service. Boot and Saddle would soon have all the nonsense out of them, and send them back much healthier and better fellows. Campaigning is the only thing to put a dash of cayenne pepper into the soup of life."

"Our cayenne gets rather damp here," said Sabretasche. "I confess I miss my reading-chair, my smoking-room, my periodicals, my papers, my whist, my wines, my club—the 'sweet shady side of Pall Mall;'—above all, Society. All these are great *agrémens* of life."

"But confess, Colonel, you're less fastidious and less dandified?" asked De Vigne.

"I never was a dandy—you mistake. As for fastidiousness. I manage with a shirt a week in the Crimea, because I

can't have more; but I shall have two per diem again as soon as ever I go back. I let my beard grow here because I have no time to have it shaved; but I shall have it very gladly cut to a decent length as soon as I rejoice in a decent valet!"

"Nonsense! What are shirts or beards, compared with the *verve*, the excitement, the reality of active service?"

"Certainly nothing! If our days here were all twenty-fifths of October, they would be delightful," said Sabretasche, with that sad smile which, when he exerted himself to be cheerful, showed how painful and unreal the effort was. "All I say is, that I *do* prefer an Auxerre carpet to this extremely perilous mud; that I do like much better to have hot water and almond soap, to being only able to wash my hands at very distant intervals; and it would be ridiculous to pretend that I don't think a dinner in Belgrave-square more palatable than this tough turkey; nor my usual toilette more agreeable than these ragged and nondescript garments!"

"And yet one has never heard a word of complaint from that fellow from our first bivouac till now!" said De Vigne to Carlton.

"*Cui bono?*" smiled Sabretasche. "It all comes in the fortune of war. Besides, there is not a murmur heard out here; the Dashers will hardly set the example! Come, Carlton, you have not told us half the news."

Carlton told us plenty of news; of marriages and deaths; intrigues of the boudoir and the cabinet; of who had won the Grand Military, and who was the favourite for the Cesarewitch; of how Dunbar had married Ela Ashburnham, and Jack Mortimer's wife run away with his groom: of how Fitzturf had been outlawed for seventy-thousand, and Monteith made a pot of money at the October meetings; of all the odds and ends of the chat, *on dits*, scandals, and gossip he had brought from the lobby, the clubs, and the drawing-rooms.

"I say, De Vigne," said he, at the last, "do you remember that bewitching Little Tressillian, who was at a ball in Lowndes-square, and whom all the men went so mad about! You knew her very well, though, didn't you?"

Carlton had never heard much of the intimacy between

De Vigne and Alma, and never guessed on what grouud he trod; by the feeble lamplight I could see De Vigne's face grow crimson with the blood that leapt into it.

"What of her?"

Carlton never noticed the chill stern tone of those brief words, hissed rather than spoken between his set teeth.

"What of her? Only that people say she levanted with that cursed fool, Castleton. I pity her if she did! I fancy it's true, too, because as I came through Paris—where I know he is—on my way here, I saw her in a carriage in the Champs Elysées that was waiting at a door, a very dashing carriage, too. I didn't know her enough to speak to her, but I recognized her in a second—it's a face you can't forget. I should have thought she'd been a cut above that, wouldn't you? But women are all alike."

De Vigne sat quite still without moving a muscle, but I saw in his face the death-like pallor I had seen there on his marriage-day. Happily for him, at that moment an orderly came to the door with a despatch from head-quarters to Sabretasche, and De Vigne, rising, bade us good night, and went out into the storm of pitiless, drenching, driving rain to seek his own tent.

The next morning a mail came in: there were some letters from Violet, by the flush that rose on the Colonel's impassive face as he received his epistles, and there were more than a dozen for De Vigne, some from men who really liked him, some from Lelia Puffdoff, and women who liked to write to one of the most distinguished men of the famous Light Brigade. He read them *pour s'amuser*. The last he took up struck him keener than a sabre's thrust—it was in Alma's handwriting. Twenty-four hours before he would have seized it, hoping against hope for an explanation of that mystery which had robbed him so strangely and suddenly of her. But now, sceptical of all good, credulous of all evil, he never for a moment doubted, or dreamed of doubting, Carlton's story. Circumstantial evidence damned her, and with that insane haste which had cost him so much all his life long, without waiting or pausing, allowing her no justice, no hearing, he tore her letter open, then flung it from him, with an oath, as he saw its heading, "Champs Elysées, Paris." It was confirmation only too strong of Carlton's tale for him to doubt it.

"He has deserted her, and she turns to me to befool me a second time!" was his mad thought as he flung her letter from him; then resealed without reading it, and directed it back to her before his purpose should fail him. So in our madness, we fling our better fate, happiness away! One letter still remained unread, indeed, unnoticed, which De Vigne never saw until he took it up to light his pipe late that night; then he opened it mechanically, glanced to the last line, and found the signature was that of the valet whom he had discharged for reading Alma's note in Wilton-crescent: "A begging letter, of course," he thought, too heart-sick with his own thoughts to pay more heed to it, as he struck a match, held it in the flame, and lighted his meerschaum with it.

So we throw aside, as valueless cards, the honours life deals us in its uncertain whist!

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE GAZELLE IN THE TIGER'S FANGS.

Now the truth did, indeed, stand thus: Vane Castleton had gone mad about Alma. I do not mean that he loved her, as poor Curly did, well enough to marry her; nor as De Vigne, who would have thrown everything away to win her; but he was wild about her, as very heartless men, *chères demoiselles*, can be wild about a woman who has bewitched them. He was first of all fascinated by her, then he was piqued by the wish to rival De Vigne, whom he disliked for some sharp sayings thrown carelessly at him; then, he was incensed by Alma's contemptuous treatment of him: and at last he swore to go there no more, to be treated *de haut en bas* by "that bewitching little siren," but to win her by fraud or force. She might hate him, he did not care for that; he did not think, with Montaigne, that a conquest, to be of value, must be *de bonne volonté* on the part of the captured; and if he had been in the East he would have sent his slaves, had her blindfolded, and kept her in his seraglio, without regard as to whether tears or smiles were the consequence. Not being able to act so

summarily, and the House of Tiara having been, from time immemorial, as eccentric as Wharton, and as unscrupulous as the Mohawks, he hit upon a plan seemingly more fitted for bygone days than for our practical and prosaic age, where police prevent all escapades, and telegrams anticipate all *dénouements*. But the more eccentric the thing the more pleasure was it to Castleton who had something of the evil vanity of Sedley, and liked to set the town talking of his bad deeds, as other men like to make it gossip of their great ones; he liked to out-Herod Herod, and his reputation for unscrupulous vice was as dear to him as though it had been the fame of the soldier or the statesman; he loved his mere approach to damn a woman's character, *à la* Caligula, and if he could win Alma by some plot which would increase his notoriety—so much the better.

On the morrow after De Vigne's visit to her, Alma sat waiting to catch the first faint beat of his horse's hoofs. She had done nothing that morning; her easel had lost all charm for her; Sylvo and Pauline obtained but little attention; and after she had filled the room with flowers, singing soft Italian barcarolles while she gathered them, till the goldfinches and the thrushes strained their throats to rival her, she threw herself down on the steps of the window to watch for her lover's coming, full of that feverish and impassioned joy which can scarcely credit its own existence.

When noon had passed, her restlessness grew into anxiety —she had expected him early; with a union of child-like and lover-like impatience she had risen with her friends the birds, hoping that he might surprise her at breakfast. Twenty times that morning had she run down to the gate, never heeding the soft summer rain that fell upon her hair, to look along the road. About one o'clock she stood leaning over the little wicket—a fair enough picture—a deep flush of anxiety was upon her cheeks, her eyes darkening with excitement and the thousand fluttering thoughts stirring in her heart; while, with that longing to look well in his eyes which had its spring in something far nobler than coquetry, her dress was as graceful as her simple but always tasteful wardrobe could afford. As she stood thus, the sound of hoofs rang upon the highway in the distance; the colour deepened in her cheeks, her whole face lighted up, her heart beat fast against the wooden bar on which

she rested. She was opening the gate to meet him; but,—when the horseman came nearer to her view she saw that it was not De Vigne, but Curly; not the one for whom her heart waited, but the one whom it rejected. He threw himself off his saddle, and caught her hand.

"Alma! for Heaven's sake do not turn away from me."

She drew it impatiently away: she held it as De Vigne's—it was to be touched by no other. Poor Curly came at an unlucky hour to plead his cause.

"Alma, is your resolution fully taken?" he said, catching her hand once more in his too tightly for her to extricate it. "Listen to me but one word; I love you so well, so dearly! Can you not give me one hope? Can you not feel some pity?

Again she drew herself away, more gently! for her first irritation had passed, and she was too compassionate a nature not to feel regret for the sorrow of which she was the cause. A look of pain passed over her glad face as she answered him naively:

"Why ask me? What I told you two days ago was the truth. I thank you very much for all your kindness, but I could never have loved you."

"You *would* have done, but for De Vigne."

A brighter flush rose over her brow; she lifted her head with a proud, eager gladness upon it; she misunderstood him, and fancied De Vigne had told his friend of their mutual love.

"No, no; if I had never known him I should have loved my ideal, of which *he* alone could have been the realisation. You are mistaken; I could never have loved any other."

The speech had a strange combination of girlish fondness and impassioned tenderness; it was a speech to fall chill as ice upon the heart of her listener; he who loved her so well, and, as is so often the fate of true affection, could win not one fond word in return!

Curly's hands grasped the rail of the gate! his face looked aged ten years with the marks of pain upon it.

"He has told you, then?" he said abruptly.

He meant of De Vigne's marriage, she thought he meant of De Vigne's love, and answered with a deep blush over her face:

"Yes!"

"My God! and you stoop to listen to him?"

"Stoop? it is he who stoops to me!"

She gloried in her love, and would no more have thought of evading acknowledgment of it than Chelonis or Eponina of evading exile or death.

"Heaven help me, then—and you!"

The two last words were too low for her to hear; but, touched by the suffering on his face, she stretched out the hand she had withdrawn.

"Indeed I am grieved myself to grieve you! Forget me, or, until you do, at least forgive me!"

"Forgive you!" repeated Curly, "what would I not; but forget you—never! Oh, my love, my darling!" he cried, clasping her hands close up to his heart, "would to God you would listen to me. I would make you so happy: you will never be so with De Vigne. He loves you selfishly; he will sacrifice you to himself; and I,—all that life can give shall be yours,—my name, my home, my rank,—and with time I will make you love me—"

At first she had listened to him in vague stupefaction; when she did comprehend his meaning she wrenched her hands away for the last time, her eyes flashing with anger, passion of another sort crimsoning her brow.

"Do you dare to insult me with such words? Do you venture to suppose that any living man could ever make me faithless to *him?* You are a true friend indeed to come and slander him in his absense! *He* would have scorned to take such mean advantage over *you!*"

With those vehement words, natural in her, but how bitter to him! Alma swept from him. His hands grasped the gate-bar till the rusty nails in the wood forced themselves through his gloves into the flesh, and watched her till the last gleam of her golden hair had vanished from his sight. Then he threw himself across his saddle, and galloped down the road, the ring of the hoofs growing fainter on Alma's ear as she listened for those that should grow nearer and nearer till they should bring De Vigne to her side. She had no thought for Curly, and no pity; I think she would have had more if she had known that never again on earth would she look upon that fair, fond face, which would so soon lie turned upwards to the pitiless sky, unconscious and calm amidst the roar of musketry and the glare of a captured citadel.

She threw herself down upon a couch, excited still with the glow of indignation that Curly's words had roused in her. Impetuous always, she was like a little lioness at any imputation on De Vigne: whether he had been right or wrong, she would have flung herself headlong into his defence; and, had she seen any faults in her idol, she would have died before she let another breathe them. Scarcely had the gallop of Curly's horse ceased to mingle with the fall of the rain-drops and the rustle of the chesnut-leaves, when the roll of carriage-wheels broke on her ear. She started up—this time she felt sure it was he—and even Pauline screamed the name she had caught from Alma, "Sir Folko! Sir Folko!"

But the girl's joyous heart fell when she saw a hired brougham standing at her gate, for she knew that if De Vigne ever drove down, he drove in one of his mail-phaetons, with his grooms. Out of the brougham came a lady, tall, stately, superbly dressed, gathering her rich skirts round with one hand as she came up the gravel path. Alma watched her with irritation and no sort of interest; she did not know her, and she supposed she was some stranger called to look at her pictures—since her Louis Dix-sept had been exhibited at the Water-Colours she had had many such visitors. The lady turned, of course, to the side of the house to approach the hall door, and Alma lay quiet on her couch stroking Pauline's scarlet crest, while the bird reiterated its cry, "Sir Folko! Sir Folko!"

She rose and bowed as her visitor entered, and looked at her steadily, with a trick Alma had of studying every new physiognomy that came before her, forming her likes and dislikes thereon; rapidly, indeed, but often unerringly. The present survey displeased her, as her guest slightly bent her stately head. They were a strange contrast! The woman tall, her figure very full, too full for beauty; artistic rouge upon her cheeks, and tinting round her superb black eyes; her attire splendid, her jewels glittering, yet with some indefinable want of the *lady* upon her: the girl small, slight, and simply dressed, with native grace and aristocracy in all her movements, and her air of mingled child-likeness, intelligence, and brilliance.

Alma rolled a chair towards her, and looked a mute inquiry as to her visitor's errand. Her guest's eyes were

fixed upon her in curious scrutiny; she seemed a woman of the world, yet appeared at a loss how to explain her call, and played with the fringe of her parasol as she said, "Have I the pleasure of seeing Miss Tressillian?"

Alma bent her head.

She toyed uneasily with the long fringe as she went on, never relaxing her gaze at Alma:

"May I inquire, too, whether you are acquainted with Major De Vigne?"

At the abrupt mention of his name, a hot blush came in Alma's face; again she bowed in silence.

"You are very intimate with him—much interested in him! are you not?"

Alma rose, her slight figure haughtily erect, her eyes sufficiently indicative of resentment at her visitor's unceremonious intrusion:

"Pardon me, madam, if *I* inquire by what title you venture to intrude such questions upon me?"

"My title is clear enough," answered her guest, with a certain sardonic smile, which did not escape Alma's quick perception, and increased her distrust of her interrogator. "Perhaps you may guess it when I ask you but one more question: Are you aware that Major De Vigne is married?"

For a moment the cruel abruptness of the question sent back the blood to the girl's heart, and her companion's bold, harsh eyes watched with infinite amusement the quiver that passed over her bright young face. But it was only for a moment; the next, Alma smiled at the idea, as if Sir Folko would conceal anything from her—above all, conceal *that!* Her rapid instincts made her mistrust and dislike this woman; she imagined it was some one who, having a grudge against De Vigne, tried this method to injure him, and her clear, fearless eyes flashed contemptuous anger on her questioner; she deigned no answer to the inquiry.

"Major De Vigne is my *friend*. I allow no stranger to mention his name to me except with the respect it deserves. I am quite at a loss to conceive why you should trouble yourself to insult me with these unwarranted interrogations. You will excuse me if I say that I am much engaged just now, and should be glad to be left alone."

She bowed as she spoke, and moved across the room to

the bell, but her visitor would not take the hint, however unmistakable; she sat still, leaning back in her chair playing with her parasol, probably puzzled whether or no the Little Tressillian was aware of her lover's marriage. High-couraged and thoroughly "game" as Alma was, she felt repugnance to this woman—a certain vague fear of, and dislike to being alone with, her

Her visitor rose too, and took a different tone, fixing her black eyes, in whose bold stare spoke a dark past, and an unscrupulous character, on those which were clear with innocence and youth.

"You take too high a tone, young girl; if you do *not* know of his marriage, you are to be pitied; if you do, you are to be blamed indeed; and if you have any shame in you, you will never, out of regard for yourself and justice to me, see Granville De Vigne again, when I tell you that—*I* am his wife!"

"*His wife!*" With ashy lips Alma re-echoed the words, "*his wife!*" that coarse, cruel-eyed woman, with her bold stare, and her gorgeous dress, which yet could not give her the stamp of Birth; for Time had not passed wholly lightly on the Trefusis, and now there was more trace of the Frestonhills milliner in her than of the varnish she had adopted from the Parisiennes, for at thirty-seven the Trefusis had grown vulgar! That woman his wife! Alma, true to her faith in, and reverence of, De Vigne, could have laughed at the mere thought! That woman his wife!—his! when but a few hours before he had called *her* his own, and kissed her, when she spoke to him of their sweet future together! She knew it was a plot against him; she would not join in it by lending ear to it. *He* could never have loved that woman—with her rouged cheeks, her tinted eyelids, her cruel eyes, her cold, harsh voice. Alma did not remember that a man's first love is invariably the reverse of his last!

"You his wife!" she repeated, with a contempt which excited the savage nature of her listener, as the Trefusis had excited the slumbering fire of Alma's character. "You *his* wife? Before pretending to such a title, you should first have learned the semblance of a lady to uphold you in the assumption of your rôle! Your impertinence in addressing me I shall not honour by resenting; but your ill-done plot, I must tell you, will scarcely pass current with me."

She spoke haughtily and impatiently, anger and disdain flashing from her expressive face, which never cared to attempt concealment of any thought passing through her mind.

"Plot!" repeated the Trefusis, with a snarl on her lips like a hound catching hold of its prey. "You think it a plot, young lady? or do you only say so to brazen it out before a woman you have foully wronged? If it *be* a plot, what say you then to that?"

Not letting go her hold upon it, she held before Alma's eyes the certificate of her marriage.

"Read it!"

Alma, who had never seen a document of the kind, saw only a printed paper, and put it aside with a haughty gesture; she would have none of this woman's enforced confidences! But the Trefusis caught her little delicate wrist, and held the certificate so that Alma could not choose but see the names with that prolix preamble by which his Grace of Canterbury so graciously permits an Englishman to wed.

*Then* Alma's face grew white, even to her lips; for an instant her heart stopped with a dull anguish of horror, but, true to her allegiance, refused, even in the face of proof, the doubt that would dishonour him; no thought that was treachery to her lover should dwell in her mind, no stranger should whisper of him in his absence to her! She threw off the Trefusis's hand as though it had been the gripe of an adder's fangs, her soft eyes flashing like dark blue steel.

"Leave my presence! Leave me! It is useless to seek to injure him with me."

As she spoke she rang the bell, and the single servant of the house responded to the summons; Alma bowed her head with the stately grace of an Empress signing to her Household, "Show this lady to the door."

For once in her life the Trefusis was baffled; she knew not how to play her next card, uncertain whether Alma was aware or unaware of her marriage to De Vigne. She had hoped to find a weak and timorous young girl, whom her dignity would awe and her story overwhelm, but she was cheated of her second revenge. Mortified and incensed she swung round, with her devil's sneer upon her fine bold features:

"Excuse me, Miss Tressillian, for my very misplaced pity! I fancied you a young and orphaned girl, whom knowledge of the truth might warn from an evil course; I regret to find one on whom all warnings are thrown away, and who gives insult where she should ask for pardon. No other motive than pity for you prompted my call. I have been too often the victim of Major De Vigne's inconstancy, for it to have any longer power to wound me."

Then the woman, whom Church and Law termed his Wife, swept from the room, and the girl was left once more to her solitude. *In* that solitude the high-strung nerves gave way; while her sword and her shield were wanted she had done battle for him gallantly; but now that they were no longer needed her courage forsook her, and she lay on the couch sobbing bitterly. Tears had always been very rare with her, but of late they had found their way much oftener to the eyes which should have been as shadowless as the southern skies, whose hue they took; with passion, all other floodgates of the heart are loosed. Her wild rapture had its reaction; vehement joys ever pay their own price! She did not credit what the Trefusis had told her; her own quick perception, true in its *deduction*, though here not true in fact, knew that no really injured wife would have taken the tone of her visitor, nor such means of making her wrongs and her title known; there was something moreover false, coarse, cruel, which struck at once on her delicate senses; she felt sure it was some slander, and the certificate a forgery; she had read of women who had taken similar revenge upon men. "So many must have loved him," thought Alma, "and so many, therefore, will hate me as I should hate any who took him from me." So she reasoned with that loyal love which, truer than the love that is fabled as *blind*, will, if it see a stain on its idol, veil it from all eyes, even from its own. Still it had left upon her a sort of vague dull weight; she felt afraid, she scarcely knew of what, a terror lest her new-won joys should leave her as suddenly as they had come to her: she would have given years of her young life to look in his eyes again, and hear his voice.

Once more the roll of carriage-wheels interrupted the ceaseless fall of the heavy rain. Alma started up; dashing the tears from her flushed cheeks. She had suffered a good

deal in her brief life, but she had never known anything like the terror which, crowding the pain of hours into a single minute, laid its leaden hand upon her when she saw not De Vigne but his servant Raymond alone approach.

"Oh, my God! what has happened? He is ill!" she uttered, unconsciously: her nerves were unstrung by her interview with the Trefusis, and her imagination seized on all the evil that could have befallen him whom she loved so well.

She stood with her hands clenched in the effort to repress the emotion she could not show to a servant, and as Raymond approached her, with the silken suavity which characterised that prize valet, he seemed, for once, to be hurried and anxious.

"Madam," he began, with one of the reverential salaams which would have qualified him to be groom of the chamber, "in riding home last evening, Major De Vigne was thrown from his horse."

"Good God! . . . . is he hurt?"

No presence could restrain the agony spoken in those few brief words.

"Yes—much, madam," said Raymond hesitatingly. "The hurt might not perhaps be so severe, but inflammation, and consequently fever, have set in. He is at times unconscious, and at those times he is constantly speaking of you, Miss Tressillian; muttering your name, and calling you to come to him so incessantly that the surgeon told me, if I knew who the lady was that the Major meant, to fetch her, for that his life depended on his being kept as calm as possible. So, madam, I ventured to come and inform you. I could not tell what to do. I hope I have done right? I brought the carriage in case you might be kind enough to come."

All the light died out of the face so radiant but a short time before! she was white as a corpse, save for the blue veins which stood out upon her temples and her hands. She gave one low, deep sob, tears would not come to her relief; and her throat was hoarse and dry as after a long illness, when she answered:

"Right—quite right. I shall be ready in a moment."

Alma's love was infinitely too true, eager, and active, to stand still and weep. She never paused to reason or reflect;

all she thought of was De Vigne in suffering, perhaps in danger. *He* wanted her—that was enough! She ran upstairs, her heart suffocated with the sobs to which she would not give way while he needed nerve and action to aid him—took her hat, threw a large cloak over her dress, and was beside the carriage in an instant.

"The Major was riding towards Windsor, madam, so he is now at the nearest house to the place where he was thrown. It is many miles from here," said Raymond as he opened the door.

Alma bent her head; her thoughts were too full to notice that the man had said on his entrance that his master was riding home, now that he had been going across to Windsor; or to remark the improbability of De Vigne's having gone so far the previous night. The door was shut, Raymond got upon the box, and the brougham rolled away, bearing them from St. Crucis.

The drive was through the heavy rain, which fell without cessation. She could not remember how far Windsor was from Richmond; she knew little or nothing of London or its environs, indeed of England itself, so secluded had her life been since she quitted Lorave; but the way seemed interminable. So horrible grew the long dreary drive, through roads so strange to her, in her fear and anxiety, with the ceaseless sigh and sob of the drenching rain, that Alma, impressionable as most enthusiastic natures are, became nervous and fearful, and excited to a vague and heavy dread of some approaching evil. All her radiant joy of the morning had died away. That dreary, solitary drive! how long it seemed! how horrible the grey, dark storm, the ceaseless roll of the wheels, the wearisome, unfamiliar road! Alma, as if conscious of her doom, cowered down in a corner of the carriage, like a young child fearful of the dark, looking back on the sweet past of yesterday, as beside the grave of one they have loved men look back on the time when the dead lips were smiling, and the closed eyes were bright.

The carriage stopped at last on the outskirts of Windsor, rolled through iron scroll-gates under some dripping larch-trees, through small grounds, very ill kept, with long grass and flowers run wild, and a statue or two, moss-grown, grim, and broken: the very aspect of the place struck a fresh chill into her heart, and nothing in the house itself

reassured her. It was a cross between an old country house and a lorette's villa, and had an untidy, dissipated unpleasant look about it to one long used to the brilliant sunlight of Dorave. It seemed a house that might have seen dark stories and painful scenes, smothered from the light of justice, between those irregular and dirty walls. The carriage stopped again before a low side-door, and Alma now thought little of the house—only of the one who had sought its temporary asylum. She sprang from the brougham the instant Raymond let down the steps.

"Where is your master?"

"I will take you to him, madam, if you will have the kindness to follow me," said that silky valet.

Alma bent her head in acquiescence, and followed him through several crooked passages and tortuous corridors, through which she could not have found her way back unaided; at last he threw open the door of a room, and stood aside for her to enter. It was now nearly nine o'clock; the dense clouds and drenching rain had made it as dark in the country as though it were fully night; and in this chamber, of which the curtains before the windows at the far end were drawn, Alma could see nothing save the indistinct outline of a table and some chairs near her. She turned hastily to Raymond:

"Is Major De Vigne—"

But the valet had withdrawn, closing the door behind her, and she heard a sharp click like the turning of a key in a lock. Then—a deadly agony of fear came upon her, and she trembled from head to foot; horrid sights, sounds, thoughts, seemed to hover round her; she had had from infancy a strange terror of being alone in darkness, and she stretched out her hand with a pitiful cry:

"Sir Folko—Granville—where are you?"

In answer to her call a man's form drew near, indistinct in the gloom, and in her ear a voice whispered:

"My beautiful, my idolised Alma! there is one here who loves you dearer than him you call. If I have erred in bringing you hither, pardon at least a fault of too much love!" . . . .

A shriek of loathing, despair, horror, and anguish burst from Alma's lips, ringing shrill and loud through the darkened room.—she knew that the speaker was Castleton!

She struggled from his grasp, and mastering her terror with the courage which was planted side by side in her nature with so much that was poetic and susceptible, she turned on him haughtily:

"Lord Vane, what do you think to gain by daring to insult me thus? Major de Vigne's servant brought me here to see his master, who was dangerously hurt. I desire you to leave me, or, if this *be* your house, and you have one trace of a gentleman's honour left in you, to tell me at once where I may find my friend?"

Castleton could have laughed outright at the little fool's simplicity, but he was willing to win her by gentle means if he could, perhaps, for there are few men entirely blunted and inured to shame; he scarcely relished the fiery scorn of the eyes that flashed upon him in the twilight.

"Do not be so severe upon me," he said softly. "Surely one so gentle to all others may pardon an offence born from a passion to which she of all others should show some pity. I would have told you yesterday how madly I love you—and my love is no cold English fancy, Alma!—I love you, my divine little angel; and my idolatry has driven me perhaps to error, but an error such as women should surely pardon."

"Off! do not touch me!" cried Alma fiercely, as his hand wandered towards the delicate form that he could crush in his grasp as a tiger's fangs a young gazelle. Your words are shame, your love pollution, your presence hateful! Insult me no more, but answer me, yes or no, where *is* my friend?"

"De Vigne? The devil knows! He is with his wife, I dare say; he can't hear you, and would not help you if he did."

"It is a lie!" moaned Alma, almost delirious with fear and passion. "He has no wife; and he will revenge for me all your dastard insults!" . . . .

"How will he hear of them, pretty one?" laughed Castleton, seizing her in his arms, while his hot breath sullied her cheeks. "Do you think, now I have you, I shall let you go again? I have hardly caged my bird only to let her fly! We shall clip your wings, loveliest, till you like your captivity too well to try and free yourself. You are mine now, Alma—who can save you?"

"I shall never be yours—dastard!—coward!" gasped she, striking him a fierce blow with her clenched hands upon his eyes, in her agony, as she struggled in the iron grasp of his embrace, maddened by the loathsome kisses he branded on her lips—the abhorred caresses that seemed to pollute her with infamy and shame. Involuntarily he loosened his hold one moment, in the sharp pain and sudden blindness of the unexpected blow. That moment was enough for her; she wrenched herself from him, flew across the room, tore aside the curtain of one of the windows;—by good fortune it was open, and, without heeding what height she might fall, leaped from its low sill on to the ground without. The window was five feet off the lawn below, but happily for her there lay just where she alighted a large heap of cut grass—all that had been mown off the turf that morning having been gathered together just beneath the window. It broke her fall, but she lay stunned till Castleton's voice from the chamber made her spring to her feet, like a hare that has lain down panting to rest in its run for life, and starts off again with every nerve quivering and every sense stretched, at the bay of the hounds in pursuit. She sprang to her feet, and ran along the lawn. The grounds were a labyrinth to her, the light was dim and dusky, the rain still fell in torrents, but Alma's single thought was to get away from that horrible house, to which she had been lured for such a horrible fate. She fled across the lawn, and through a grove of young firs, taking the first path that presented itself, the road through the plantation, which led her on about a quarter of a mile; she flew over the dank wet turf with the speed of a hunted antelope. Yet to her, with the dread of pursuit upon her, thinking every moment she heard steps behind her, feeling every instant in imagination the grasp of her hated lover and foe, it seemed as though leaden weights were on her ankles, and each step she took bare her a hundred steps backward. At the end of the plantation was a staken-bound fence, and a high gate, with spikes on its top rail. Her heart grew sick with terror: if she turned back she would fall into Castleton's grasp as surely as a fox that doubles from a wall falls a victim to the pack. She knew he would pursue her; to retrace her steps would be to meet him, and Alma knew what mercy she would find at his hands. An old man, gathering up his

tools after thinning the trees and loosening the earth round the roots, was near the gate, and to him Alma rushed:

"Let me through! let me through, for God's sake!" she gasped, her fingers clenching on his arm, the wild terror on her face telling her story without words.

The old peasant, a hard-featured, kindly-eyed old man, looked at her in amazement.

"Poor bonny child, where would ye go?"

"Let me through quick—quick, for the love of Heaven!" whispered Alma, panting with her breathless race.

Without another question the woodsman unlocked the gate, and let her pass; she flew through it with a murmured "God reward you!" and as he locked the padlock after her, and took up his axe and spade, he muttered to his own thoughts, "Castleton would flay me alive if he could for that; but I don't care—she's too bonnie a birdie for such an evil cage."

Once through the gate, she found herself where two cross roads met; ignorant which led back to London, she took the one on her right and ran on; the thick drops of the shower, that still fell fast and heavily on her golden hair, that had fallen dishevelled and unbound in her wrestling with Castleton; her heart beating, her delicate limbs, unused to all fatigue, already beginning to fail her, every nerve on the rack in the dread horror of pursuit, strained to such tension that not a bough cracked in the wind or a rain-drop splashed in the puddles but she thought it was his emissaries chasing her. On and on she ran, her hair streaming behind her, heavy and dank with water, her feet soaked and clogged with the weight of the mud gathered fresh with every step, and every sinew throbbing, cracking, aching with that merciless race from what was worse than death. At last she could do no more; with all her terror, all her spirit, ever much greater than her strength, Nature rebelled against the unnatural strain. She could not run, but she walked on and on, halting for breath, toiling wearily, ready to sink down on the wet, cold earth, murmuring every now and then De Vigne's name, or gasping a prayer to God. On she still went, she knew not where only away—away—for ever from her abhorred pursuer.

Tenderly nurtured, delicately bred, sensitive as a hot-house flower, this child of art, of love, of refinement, with

her high-wrought imagination, her delicate mould of form and thought, her childlike fear of solitude in darkness, suffered tortures. On and on she dragged her weary way, till the dusky haze of rain and fog deepened to the denser gloom of night, and the storm ceased, and the moon came out over the glades of Windsor Forest. She had toiled on till she had reached the outskirts of the royal park, and as the moonlight shivered on the gaunt boughs and played on the wet leaves Alma stopped, powerless to stir again, and a deadly terror of something vague and unknown crept upon her, for her brain was strongly creative, her nerves tender, her mind steeped in poetry, romance, and out-of-the-world lore even from her childhood, when she had believed in fairies because Shakspeare and Milton wrote of them. A deadly terror came upon her; a hundred wild stories that she would have laughed at at another hour rose in chaos before her mind, bewildered already with the horrors of the past day. She was afraid to be alone with that vast silent forest, those cold, solemn stars! She was afraid of the night, of the stillness, of the solitude; she who but so few hours before had been gathered to her lover's heart and sheltered in his arms, there, as she had thought, to find an asylum all her life. She was afraid; a cold trembling seized her, she looked wildly up at the gaunt boughs and silver foliage in the moonlight; no sound in the hushed night but the hooting of an owl or the clash of the horns of fighting stags. Hideous phantoms glared around; vile shapes gibbered in her ear. One sob rose in her throat, De Vigne's name rang through the quiet woodlands and up to the dark skies, then she fell forward insensible on the tangled moss, her long bright hair trailing on the grass, her fair brow lying on the dank earth, her hands clenched on the gnarled roots.

There she lay; and as if in pity for this fair, fragile, human thing, the summer winds sighed softly over her, and touched her brow with cool caresses as they played among her wet and golden curls. She had no power to move, to stir even a limb; terror, fatigue, that horrible and breathless race through the pitiless storm, had beaten all the young life out of her. Nature could do no more; the spirit could no longer bear up against the suffering of the body; where she had fallen she lay, broken and worn out;

if Castleton had been upon her she could not have risen or dragged herself one other step. She was but half conscious; wild thoughts, vague horrors, loathsome sights and sounds, indistinct with the unembodied terrors of night-dreams, flickered at times before her closed eyes, and hovered on the borders of her brain; still she lay there, powerless to move from the phantasms of her mind, equally powerless to repel them with her will. All volition was gone; terror and bodily fatigue had done their work, till the mind itself at last succumbed, outwearied, and a heavy, dreamless sleep stole on her, the sleep of nature utterly worn out. There she lay on the cold, dank moss, the dark brushwood waving over her, above her the silent heavens, with their chill, pale stars, while the great boughs of the forest stirred with a mournful shiver, and through their silent glades moved, with melancholy sigh and measure, the wind of the summer night.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

THE morning dawned; the herds of deer rose from their fern couches, and trooped down to the pools for their morning drink, and fragrance rose up from the wet grass that sparkled in the light after the storm of the past day, and from the deep dells, and shadowy glades, and sunny knolls of the Royal Forest. One of the rangers, a white-haired old man, who had lived in the stately woodlands till he loved them almost as men love their own ancestral homes, was going home for his breakfast, when he caught sight of something gleaming white among the brushwood on the outskirts of the forest, and drawing near, saw Alma as she slept. He was going to awaken her somewhat roughly perhaps, but her attitude touched him, and as he stooped over her and marked the fine texture of the dress, soaked through with mud and rain, her delicate hands, the circles under the eyes dark as the lashes resting on them, and the parted lips, through which every breath came with feverish

and painful effort, he shrank involuntarily from touching harshly what seemed so fragile and at his mercy.

He stooped over her perplexed. He did not like to leave her; he did not like to move her.

"Poor pretty child!" he muttered, drawing her thick golden hair through his rough fingers. "Who's sent her to such a bed, I wonder? If she's been lying out all night, she's caught her death of cold. I should like to take her home, poor young thing; but what would the old woman say?"

The worthy man, being a trifle henpecked, paused at this view of the question; his charity halting before the dread of another's condemnation of it, as charity in the great world shrinks and hides her head before the dread of the "*qu'en dira-t-on!*" He wavered; he could not leave her there; he was afraid, poor fellow, to take her home, lest a hissing voice should condemn his folly, and a shrew's vituperations reward him for his Samaritanism; and his dog, with the true instinct and ready kindness with which animals often shame their owners, began to lick the burning hands with his great tongue in honest well-meaning to do good, and to offer what help lay in his power.

As his master wavered, ashamed to leave, afraid to take her with him, a lady and two little girls, a governess and her pupils, walking before their breakfast, drew near too. The keeper knew them, and looked up as they approached, for they were astonished as well as he at this woman's form, with the white dress and golden hair, lying down on the dark dank moss.

"Dear me, Reuben—dear me, what is this?" asked the governess, a little, tremulous, shy person, while the children's eyes grew round and bright, with wonder and pleasure at seeing something strange to tell when they reached home.

"It's a girl, ma'am," responded the keeper, literally, while the lady drew near a little cautiously; for, though a good-hearted, gentle creature, she *was* a woman, and by no means exempt from the peculiar theories of her sex; and no lady, we know, will look at another, however in distress or want, unless she knows she is "proper" for her own pure eyes to rest upon.

"It's a woman," went on Reuben. "She looks like a

lady, too, ma'am—leastways her face and her hands do—and her dress is like them bits of cobweb that fine ladies wear, that are no good at all for wind and weather. If she's been lying here all night, sure she'll die afore long; by the look on her, I fear she's been out in all the rain last evening. She's only asleep now, ma'am, though she do look like a corpse, and you see it ain't a little thing for poor people like us to get an invalid into our house for, maybe, two or three months and a long doctor's bill, and perhaps in the end nothing to pay it with; and as for the workhouse—"

"Couldn't we take her home with us? I am sure mamma would let us. Don't you think we might, Miss Russel?" asked the younger girl.

"Hush, Cecy! Don't be silly. How could we take a person home that we know nothing about? She can't be a very *nice* person, you are sure, Cecy, or she wouldn't be out here alone," said her elder sister, reprovingly, who had already learnt her little lesson in the world's back-reading of charity, and had already a special little jury of her own for haranguing and converting people according to the practices she saw around her.

"Let me look at her, poor young creature. Let me look at this poor young thing!" said the governess, her compassion getting the better of her prudence. She stooped over the figure that lay so motionless amidst all their speculations upon her, turned her face gently towards the light, and as the sun-rays fell upon it, cried out in bitter horror, "Alma! Alma! How can she have come here?" And, to the children's wonder, their governess sank on her knees, by the girl, pushing the damp hair off her forehead, kissing and weeping over her in her astonishment and her sorrow.

"Do you know her, ma'am?" asked the keeper, "Do you know her?" cried the children, in shrill chorus of surprise and curiosity. The poor lady could not answer them at first; she was speechless with bewilderment to find her darling lying here sleeping, with the damp earth for her pillow, out under the morning skies, with nothing to shelter her from night dew or noontide sun, as lonely, as wretched, as homeless as the most abject outcast flying for her life.

Whether she woke or not she could not tell; a heavy,

struggling sigh heaved her chest; she tried to turn, but had no power: then her eyes unclosed, but there was no consciousness in them; the lids dropped again immediately; a shiver of icy cold ran through her; she lay motionless as the dead.

"What can we do with her?" cried poor Miss Russel, half beside herself with grief for the girl and powerlessness to aid her, for in her own home she was but a dependent. "What shall we do?" cried the poor lady. "She will die, if she is half an hour longer without medical aid. Poor little darling, what can ever have brought her to this—"

"I'll take her to our house," said Reuben, decided at last. "Since you know her, ma'am, that'll be everything to my missis."

"Do, pray do," assented the governess, eagerly; she would have done anything that anybody could have suggested, no matter how much to her own hindrance, but by nature she was nervous, timid, and undecided. "Take her at once, and pray move her tenderly. I must see the young ladies home, but I shall be at your cottage as soon as you are. Take her up gently, My poor darling!"

Reuben lifted the girl in his arms, and laid the golden head with no harsh touch against his shoulder. They might have taken her where they would, Alma knew nothing of it. Miss Russel looked at her lingeringly a moment; she longed to go with her, but she dared not take her pupils to see a girl whom their reverend father "did not know." She retraced her steps rapidly, and Reuben went onwards with his burden.

She was as good as her promise. The keeper's wife, with no over good grace, had but just received her new charge, with much amazement and grumbling, when the governess came, and helped her to lay Alma on the couch, bathe her burning temples, bind up her long, damp hair, and then wait—wait, unable to do more, till medical aid should arrive.

For six weeks Alma lay on that bed, unable to move hand or foot, unconscious to everything surrounding her her brow knit with pain, her eyes wide open, without sense or thought, a burning glare in her aching eyeballs, her cheeks flushed deeply, her long hair wet with the ice laid on her temples—her mind gone, not in raving or chattering

delirium, but into a strange, dull, voiceless unconsciousness, in which the only tie that linked her to life and reason was that one name which now and then she murmured faint and low, "Sir Folko!—Granville!"

The night out in the forest brought on inflammation of the lungs; and against her danger, her own youth, and the skill that grappled for her with death, alone enabled her to battle. At last youth, and science conquered; at last the bent brow grew calm, the crimson flush paled upon her face, her breathing grew more even, her voice ceased to murmur its piteous wail, and she slept.

"She will live now," said the doctor, watching that calm and all-healing sleep.

"Who is that man whose name she mutters so constantly?" asked Montressor, the doctor, outside her door, while Alma slept.

Miss Russel was somewhat embarrassed to reply; her calm and prudent nature had puzzled in vain over Alma's strange, expansive attachment, half childish in its frankness, but so wildly passionate in its strength.

"Really I can hardly tell. I fancy—I believe—she mean's a friend of Mr. Tressillian's, of whom I know she was very fond."

Montressor smiled.

"Can we find him? He should be within call, for if she has wanted him so much in unconsciousness, she had better not be excited by asking for him in vain when she awakes. What is he?"

"An officer in the army—in the Cavalry I believe," answered the governess, much more inclined to keep De Vigne away than to bring him there.

"A soldier? Oh! we can soon learn his whereabouts, then. What is his name, do you know?"

"Major De Vigne," said the governess, reluctantly. Montressor put the name in his note-book. Two days after he called on Miss Russel:

"I wrote to the Horse Guards for Major De Vigne's address. They tell me he is gone to the Crimea. Tiresome fellow! he would have been my best tonic."

The doctor might well say so, for when at length she awoke from the lengthened sleep that had given her back life, enfeebled as she was, so much so that for many days

she lay as motionless, though not as unconscious as before, the first words she spoke, which scarcely stirred the air, were:

"Where is he? Bring him here. Pray do; he will come if you tell him I am ill. Go and find him. Go!"

And little as the governess could sympathise with or comprehend this to her strangely reprehensible attachment for a man who, as she thought, had never said a word of affection in return, who certainly had never offered to make Alma his wife—the only act on a man's part that could possibly justify a woman in liking him, according to that prudent and tranquil lady's theory—she grieved solely to have no answer with which to relieve that ceaseless and plaintive question, "Why does he not come? Why don't you send for him?" and, far from quick at a subterfuge, and loathing a falsehood, she was obliged to have recourse to an evasion.

And Alma, too weak to rebel, too exhausted still to recall anything of the past, burst into tears, and lay with her face to the wall, weeping low, heart-broken sobs that went to the heart of those who heard them.

"She will never get well like this," said Montressor, in despair at seeing his victory of science over death being undone again as fast as it could. "Who *is* this Major De Vigne? Deuce take the man, why did he go away just when one wanted him the most? Was Miss Tressillian engaged to him?"

"Not that I ever heard," replied Miss Russel, sorely troubled with the subject. "But you see, Mr. Montressor, she has very strong affections, and she has led a strange, solitary life, and Major De Vigne was her grandpapa's friend, and has been very kind to her since she came to England, but—you know—it would hardly be correct, if he *were* in England, for him to come here—"

"Correct!" repeated Montressor, with a smile that the man of the world could not for the life of him repress at the good governess's prudery, "we medical men, my dear lady, have no time to stop for conventionalities when life is in the balance. If Major De Vigne were anywhere in this country, I would make him come and quiet my patient by a sight of him; all she does is to sob quietly, and murmur that man's name to herself, and if we cannot get at the

mind we cannot work miracles with the body. Any shock would be better than this dreamy lethargy; there is no knowing to what mischief it may not lead. I shall tell her he has gone to the Crimea!"

"Whom do you wish so much to see?' asked Montressor gently, when he visited Alma on the morrow and found her lying in the same despondent attitude, no colour in her cheek, no light in her sunk eyes.

Alma's mind was not yet wholly awake, but dim memories of what had passed, and what had brought her there, hovered round her brain, entangled with the phantasma of delirium. All she was fully awake to, and vividly conscious of, was her love for De Vigne: so strong was that that she started up in her bed when Montressor asked the question, her eyes getting back some of their old luminous light.

"Sir Folko—Granville! I am sure they have not told him I am ill, or he would have come. If I could see my old nurse she would tell him—where is she, too? it is so strange—so very strange! Will *you* tell him? do, pray do!" And Alma sank back upon her pillows with a heavy, weary sigh.

Montressor put his hand upon her pulse and kept it there.

"Do you love this friend of yours so much then?" he asked her, gently still.

Alma looked at him a moment; then her eyes drooped, her mind was dawning, and with it dawned the recognition of Montressor as a stranger, and that reluctance to speak of De Vigne to others which was blended with her demonstrative frankness *to* him. She answered him more calmly, with a simplicity and fervour which touched Montressor, though the unmasked human nature which his profession had often shown him had made him naturally sceptical of many of the lisplays of feeling that he saw.

"Yes," said Alma, lifting her eyes to his face. "Yes, he is all I have on earth! and he will come to me—he will indeed—if you will only let him know. I cannot think why he is not here. I wish I could remember—"

She pressed her hands to her forehead—the history of the last two months began to come to her, but still slowly and confusedly.

"Keep quiet, and you will remember everything."

Alma shook her head with a faint sign of dissent. "Not if you keep him away from me—it is a plot, I know it is a plot! Why am I to lie here and never see him? It is cruel! I cannot think why you all try to keep him away—"

She was getting excited; two feverish spots burned in her cheeks and her eyes glowed luridly.

"No one is trying to keep him away," said Montressor gravely and slowly. "Who should plot against you, poor child? But your friend is a soldier, and soldiers cannot always be where they would. There is a war, you know, between England and Russia, and Major De Vigne has been sent off to the Crimea."

He spoke purposely in few and simple words, not to confuse her with lengthened sentences or verbose preparation. As he expected it took instant effect. Alma sprang up in her bed.

"Gone—gone—away from me!"

Montressor looked at her kindly and steadily:

"Yes; it was his duty as a soldier."

"Gone!—gone! Oh, my God! And to war! Gone! and he never came for one farewell. He may be ill, and I shall not be there; he may die, and I shall not know it! he may lie in his grave, and I shall not be with him; Gone!—gone! If it *be* true, let me go to him; God will give me strength, and I love him too well for death to have power over me till I meet him once again."

In her delirious agony she would have sprung from her couch had not Montressor held her down in a firm grasp.

"Lie still, and listen to me. It is true Major De Vigne is gone to the Crimea; probably he was ordered off, as officers often are, on a moment's notice. He may have sent to you, he may have gone to take leave of you, but that would have been at your home, he could not tell that you were here. If you wish to see him again—if you wish, as you say, to follow him to the Crimea—you must calm yourself. If you loveyour friend, you must do what I am sure he would wish you—your utmost to be quiet and to recover."

She listened to him with more comprehension in her large, sad eyes than had been in them since Montressor first saw her. "Thank you, thank you; you are very kind!" But then her head drooped on her hands, and a storm of

tears convulsed her frame. "Gone!—gone! Oh, life of my life, why did you leave me?"

But Montressor did not mind those tears—there were vitality, passion, reality, and strength in them. He left her to go his rounds, and when she was alone, with this shock, all the past, link on link, came slowly to Alma's mind. The horrible race in the midsummer storm, the terrors of that night in Windsor Forest, which had ended in bringing her thither, came back upon her memory; and De Vigne had doubtless heard of that flight with Castleton, and, accrediting evil of her, had given her up and gone to the Crimea! She could have shrieked aloud in her agony to have lost him thus.

There was but one remembrance which forced her to calm herself, the one on which Montressor had relied; that to dispel in any way this hideous barrier that had risen up between them, she must recover. In Alma, with all her childlike gaiety and reckless impulsiveness, there was much strong volition, much concentrated fixity of will and purpose; she had not a grain of patience, but she had much resolution.

Reuben's close cottage did not facilitate her restoration; light, air, comforts, atmosphere, all that were most needful for her, were inaccessible there. She had barely strength enough to be lifted from her bed without fainting, and Montressor saw that without the freedom of air, to which she was accustomed, she would never be better.

Miss Russel's rector, like many another rector, since he "knew nothing of the young person," would not have thought of wasting one of his spare beds on a stranger "of no connexions," and "you know, my dear, for anything we can tell, perhaps of no very pure moral character," as he remarked to his wife, previous to rustling into church in his stiff and majestic surplice, and giving for his text the story of Mary Magdalene. Montressor was not counted a good man by his rector; indeed, having certain latitudinarian opinions of his own, consequent on his study of man and of nature, and not always keeping them to himself, as privately as prudence and his practice might have suggested, was somewhat of a thorn in the rector's side, especially as in argument Montressor inevitably floored him with extreme humiliation, and the rector being once

driven to define Grace by him was compelled to the extremely uncomfortable and illogical answer, for which he would have scolded his wife's youngest Sunday scholar, "Well, dear me, sir;—why, sir, grace *is* grace!" Montressor, moreover, did not always go to church, but preferred strolling in Windsor Forest, and thinking of that great God of Nature whom men dwarf in their sermons and exclude from their lives. Therefore, you see, it was very natural for poor Miss Russel to look to the rector, and not to Montressor for Charity; but—and I fancy that is as natural too—it was in him and not in the rector that she found it. Montressor knew that a week or two in a house like his might secure Alma's restoration, while she might linger on and on for an indefinite time in the oppressive atmosphere of Reuben's cottage, close, dark, and inodorous. As soon as she was able to be moved, Alma, too weak to protest against his will, was carried to his house; and there did daily grow stronger and better, and now began to recover as rapidly as she had been slow to do so before.

Mrs. Montressor, young herself, had taken a deep interest in her husband's patient. She received her in her house with delight, and felt a not unpardonable curiosity to know her story, and how she came there that midsummer night. This Alma, as soon as she was able, told her. She spoke very little of De Vigne; his name was too dear to her to bring it forward more than she could help, but all the rest she told frankly and fully, as was due, to her new-found friends.

As soon as ever she had strength enough to write, Alma's first effort was to pen to De Vigne the whole detail of Castleton's plot, pouring out to him all her love and sorrow. When that was done, she sank back on her pillows with more bitter tears than she had ever shed. Many weary weeks must come and pass away, many weary days must dawn, and many nights must fall, before she could have an answer; and even now, before that reached him, what evil might not have befallen him!

"Would it cost much money to go to the Crimea?" she asked her doctor, as he paid her his visit that evening, fixing her eyes on his with their earnest and brilliant regard.

"A great deal, my little lady."

"How much?" asked Alma wistfully.

"A hundred or two, at the least."

Her lips quivered, and her head drooped with a heavy sigh.

"Ah, and I have nothing! But, Mr. Montressor, are there not nurses with the army? Have I not heard that ladies sometimes go to be in the hospitals? Could not I go out to him in that way?"

Montressor smiled, amused yet touched.

"Poor child! you are much fit for a nurse. What do you know of wounds, of sickness, of death? What qualification have you to induce them to give you such an office? Do you think they would take such a fair face as yours among the sick wards? No, no, that is impracticable. You must *wait*: the lesson hardest of all to learn—one, I dare say, you have never had to learn at all."

It was true she never had, and it was one she never would learn; she would fret her life out like a fettered nightingale, but she never would endure confinement calmly like a caged bird Not only would she have gone to the Crimea had she been rich, but had she but known of any means she would have worked her way there at any cost or any pain, only to be near him in his danger, and to hear him say that for all the witnesses against her he knew that she was his and his alone. But Alma had to bow before that curse, under which much that is strongest, noblest, and best in Genius, Talent, and Love, has gone down, never able to shake off its cruel chain upon their wings, the barren curse of—Want of Money!

Of course she was desirous to leave Montressor's house as soon as she was able, and warmly as they pressed her to stay, she fixed the earliest day she could bear the drive for her return to St. Crucis. She had not waited till her return to know when and how De Vigne had heard of her flight with Castleton. Old Mrs. Lee had written her word, as calm lookers-on often do write of the fiercest passions and bitterest sorrows that pass unseen before their very eyes, "The Major called, my darling child, and I telled him all as I thought it to be, but as, thank Almighty God, it wasn't. He took it uncommon quiet like, and walked out, and I haven't seen not nothing of him since."

How deep into Alma's heart went those few common words "uncommon quiet-like, and then walked out!" What volumes they spoke to her of that mighty passion

still and iron-bound as the ice mountains of the Arctic but as certain as they to burst and break away, bringing death and destruction in its fall! More for the suffering she had caused him, than from that which had fallen upon herself, did Alma mourn for the impetuosity which had flung her so unconscious an assistant into Castleton's plot. "If he die *I* shall have murdered him!" That was the one cry that went up from her heart every hour.

The day was fixed for her to leave Windsor for St. Crucis. Montressor and his wife were both unwilling to part with her; for her story had all won them to her; and there was a peculiar, nameless charm in her foreign fervour, joined to the childlike softness of her voice and manners.

"The Molyneux are going to Paris," said Montressor to his wife, the morning before Alma left them.

"Indeed! Why and when?"

"Well, in the first place, Miss Molyneux must have change of air somewhere. I suggested Italy, but she would not hear of it! her mother, Paris, to which her ladyship has certain religious, social, and fashionable leanings, all drawing her at once; and to that she assented. *Pour cause*, it is nearer to the Crimea!"

"Is that Violet Molyneux?" asked Alma eagerly. They had fancied her asleep upon the sofa. "Is see not married to Colonel Sabretasche?"

"No!" answered Montressor. "A fortnight before their wedding-day, his first wife, whom he believed dead, came forward and asserted her rights. I never heard all the details. Now he has gone to the Crimea—but do you know her?"

"Yes! Another wife!—how she must hate that woman!" And Alma shuddered as she thought how *she* would have hated the Trefusis if that lie, that fable, had been true!

"And the wife, eh, what pity for her, Miss Tressillian!" smiled Montressor.

Alma shook her head. "None! If she had left her husband all those years, long enough to make him think her dead, she could care nothing for him."

"Perhaps *he* left *her*. More probable!"

"Is Colonel Sabretasche gone to the Crimea?" asked Alma, disregarding his suggestion. It touched her strangely, this story of that radiant belle whom she had once envied.

"Yes, and he could hardly have refused the campaign even had it taken him from his bridal days."

"No; but she would have gone with him!—and they are going to Paris, you say?"

"Yes; I recommended it; so did Dr. Watson, when he sounded Miss Molyneux's lungs, and agreed with me that there was no mischief yet, though there may be before long. After her parting with the Colonel, she lay in a dead swoon, from which they could not wake her. They sent for the physicians and for me; and since then she has never truly recovered; she will smile, she will talk to her mother, to her friends; but her health suffers. Lady Molyneux would like to have a companion for her in Paris; the Viscountess will have a thousand religious excitements and social amusements, in which her daughter will not participate. I did not know—I thought would you——" And Montressor hesitated; for though he knew how unprovided for Alma was, he had too much delicacy to touch upon it.

"Would they take me?" said Alma, lifting her head. The sentence "Paris is nearer the Crimea" rang in her ear.

"Would you go?"

"Yes, yes—if I am free to leave them when I will. Miss Molyneux was very kind to me; I think she would take me if she knew."

"I will mention it to the Viscountess when I go to town to-morrow," said Montressor. "Since you know them, I have no doubt she will be very happy to give you the preference, and change of air will do you good as well as her daughter."

Montressor was as good as his word. Some years before, Violet's brother, then a graceless Etonian, now a young attaché to the British Legation at Paris, who had been nearly drowned in the Thames, and had been pulled out at last to go through a severe attack of bronchitis, which all but cost him his life, would probably have done so quite but for Montressor, to whom Jockey Jack was so grateful for saving his heir's life, that he gave the doctor the most beautiful mare in his stables, and had him called in whenever there was any illness in the family, though Montressor, at the onset, had mortally offended Madame by assuring her she would have very good health if she would only leave

off sal-volatile, and get up before one o'clock in the day. On that Lady Molyneux had had nothing more to say to him till her pet physician, who had kept her good graces by magnifying her migraines and flattering her nerves, had once very nearly killed her by doctoring her for phthisis when her disease was but the more unpoetic ailment of the liver. Since that time he had always had a certain influence over the Viscountess, possibly because he was the only man who had seen her without her rouge, and told her the truth courteously but uncompromisingly, and when he mentioned Alma as a companion for Violet, her ladyship graciously acquiesced. "Miss Tressillian! She did not recollect the name. Very likely she had seen her, but she really could not remember. Artist, was she? Oh, she thought she *had* some recollection of a girl Violet patronised, but she couldn't remember. If Mr. Montressor recommended her, that was everything; as long as she was ladylike, and of unimpeachable character, that was all she required. She only wanted her to be with them in case Violet were unwell or declined society. She must be free to leave them any day she chose? What a very singular stipulation! However, rather than have any more trouble about it, would he have the goodness to tell her she would give her fifty guineas and her travelling expenses; and they should leave London that day week."

"Fifty guineas! Less than her maid makes by her place!" thought Montressor, as he threw himself into a hansom to drive back to the Waterloo station. He was a generous man himself; he had no cant of benevolence about him; he considered that to people delicately nurtured, the struggles, the mortification, the narrowed lines of poverty are far harder than to the poor, born amidst squalor, nurtured in deprivation, whose most resplendent memories and dreams are of fat bacon and fried potatoes. He was generous, but discriminately so: and though he compelled his just dues from the man who had lamb and peas at their earliest, while by a woe-begone face and dexterous text he was making the rector believe him an object of profoundest pity, Montressor would not take a farthing from the young girl, on whose delicate organisation and quick susceptibilities he knew the poverty, from which her own talents had alone protected her, and from which in illness they could not guard her, must prey heavily.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### ONE OF THOSE WHOM ENGLAND HAS FORGOTTEN.

THE chill Crimean winds blew from the North of Sebastopol, and the dust whirled and skerried before our eyes, as we kept the line in front of Cathcart's-hill on the morning of the 8th September, while the Guards stood ready in Woronzoff-road, and the Second and Light Divisions moved down to the trenches, and the Staff stationed themselves in the second parallel of the Green Hill Battery, and the amateurs, who had come out to see what was doing in the Crimea, as they went other years to Norwegian fishing or Baden roulette, were scattered about in yachting costume, and stirred to a little excitement as the Russian shells began to burst among us, and the bombs to fall with thuds loud enough to startle the strongest nerves.

What would young ladies at home, full of visions of conquering heroes and myrtle and bay leaves, and all the pomp and circumstances of war, have said if, in that cold, dusty, raw Crimean morning, they had seen General Simpson, with only nose and eyes exposed, coddled up in a great-coat; and General Jones, a hero in spite of costume, in his red *bonnet de nuit*, a more natural accompaniment to a Caudle lecture than to a siege; and Sir Richard, with his pocket-handkerchief tied over his ears after the manner of old ladies afflicted with catarrh? Ah me! it was not much like Davy Baird leading the forlorn hope under the hot sun of Seringapatam, or Wellington, "pale but ever collected," giving his prompt orders from the high ground behind San Christoval! Yet, God knows, there was daring and gallantry enough that day to have made of the Redan a second Ciudad Rodrigo; that it was not so, was no fault of the troops; the men whom Unett and Windham tossed up to lead, would, had they been allowed, have given England Success as they gave her Pluck; and the dead bodies piled high on the slopes of the Great Redan were offered up as cheerfully as though the fancied paradise of the Mahometan soldier awaited them, instead of the ordinary rewards of the British one—abuse and oblivion.

*We* could see little beyond the great dull parapets of the Redan, and the troops that were pouring into and over it, and, though they were forced back again under the dense smoke of the Russian musketry, twice capturing the position, and twice pushed back down the slopes, slippery with human blood and piled with human bodies. It was afterwards, from the wounded that were brought down the Woronzoff-road, and from the remnant that came back unscathed from the reeking salient, that we heard the detail of the struggle.

We heard how three times Windham sent for the support, without which nothing decisive could be done in that fatal scene of carnage, were the British, unbacked, had nothing but broken ranks to oppose to the steady fire of the enemy, and to the fresh troops who were swarming from the town and the evacuated Malakoff. We heard how, when at last he had leave "to take the Royals," the permission came too late. We heard how hand-to-hand our fellows stood their ground against the granite mass that, swelling every moment from the rear, pressed down upon them, till those who had held the salient (unsupported for an hour and three-quarters, under a fire that thinned their ranks as a scythe mows down meadow grass, grappling to the last with the Russians in the embrace of death) were forced from the loose earth and breaking gabions which made their ground, pelted with great stones, and driven down by the iron tramp that crushed alike friend and foe, till slipping, panting, bleeding, exhausted, pêle-mêle they fell on to the mass of bayonets, muskets, and quivering life mingled together in the ditch below; the men rolling over each other like loose stones down a crevasse; the living crushed by the dead, the dying struggling under the weight of the wounded; the scarps giving way and burying the living, while those who could struggle from the horrible heap of human life, where the men lay four deep, ran for life and death to reach the English trench. We heard that, and more too. Sad stories passed from one to another We were all down in the mouth that night; for though the officers had been game as men could be, flinging down their lives as of no account, their men had not imitated them; and it was hardly the tale that we, after the long winter of '54–'55, and the weary, dreary, hopeless months

of inaction, had hoped to be rewarded with, by sending home to England. Wellington was wont to say that the saddest thing, after a defeat, was a victory. I think his iron heart would have broken over the loss of human life, on the parapets of the Redan.

We knew that Curly was to lead the —th with the Light Division that day, and we thought of him anxiously enough when we saw from Cathcart's-hill the smoke pouring out from the rugged parapets, and the troops fighting their way over, only to be sent forth again decimated and exhausted.

I saw him early on the morning of the 8th, when we were all looking forward to the attack, as he was chatting with some other fellows, dressed in that careless nondescript costume which dandies of the Queen's had adopted, his old gay smile on his lips, a cap much the worse for wind and weather on those silky yellow locks that we had teased his life out about in the old school-days; and a pipe of good Turkish tobacco peering out from beneath his long blond moustaches. As we paced past him in the raw grey morning, I laughingly wished him good luck; he laughed, too, as he told us he was going in for the honours now. De Vigne, as we passed, pulled up his horse for a second, bent from his saddle, and gave him his hand, with a sudden impulse; for the first moment Curly's eyes flashed with angry fire; then the better spirit in him conquered, his hand closed firm and warm on De Vigne's, and they looked at one another as they had used to in days gone by, before the love of woman had parted them.

There was no time for speech; that cordial shake of their hands was their silent greeting and farewell, and we rode onwards to form the line of Cathcart's-hill. I think De Vigne thought more than once of his old school pet, when, from our post, we saw the ramparts of the Redan belching forth fire and smoke, and the ambulances coming down the Woronzoff-road with their heavy and pitiful burdens. Both he and I, I fancy, thought a good deal about Curly, that day, as we saw them through the clouds of dust and smoke scale the parapet, then lost them amidst the obscurity which the fire of the musketry and the flames of the burning embrasure raised around the scene of carnage and confusion; and whether he was there among the remnant

who were forced over the parapet and fell, or jumped pêle-mêle into the mass of human misery below, where English pluck was still so strong among them that some laughs they say were heard at their own misery, we could not tell. But late that night, Kennedy, one of his sergeants, told to De Vigne and me and a few other men another of those stories of individual heroism so great in their example, so unfortunate in their reward; telling it in rough, brief words, with an earnestness that gave it eloquence to us, with those frowning ramparts in front, and those crowded hospitals behind:

"We was a'most the first into the Redan, Major. When I see the ladders, so few, and what there was on 'em so short, I began to think as how we should never get in at all; but Colonel Brandling, he leaped into the ditch and scrambled up the other side as quick as a cat, with a cheer to do your heart good, and we went a'course after him and scaled the parapet, while the Russians ran back and got behind the traverses to fire upon us as soon as we got atop. What possessed 'em I dont know, Major, but you've heard that some of our men began loading and file-firing instead of follering their officers to the front; so many trench-bred infantry men *will* keep popping away for ever if you let 'em; but the Colonel led on to the breastwork with his cigar in his mouth, just where he'd put it for a lark when he jumped on the parapet. There was nobody to support us, and our force weren't strong enough to carry it, and we had to go back and get behind the traverses, where our men were firing on the Russians, and there we stayed, sir, packed together as close as sheep in a fold, firing into the Redan as long as our powder lasted. I can't tell you, Major, very well how it all went on; it wasn't a right assault like, it was all hurry-scurry and confusion, and though the officers died game, they couldn't form the troops 'cause they were so few, sir, and the salient so narrow. But it was the Colonel I was to tell you about, Major. I was beside him a'most all the time. At first he seemed as if nothing *would* hit him; one ball knocked his cap off, and another grazed his hair, but he took it all as careless as if he was at a ball, and he just turned to me, sir, with his merry smile: 'Quick work, eh, Kennedy?' Them was the last words he spoke, sir. Just at that minute the enemy charged us with the

bayonet, and the devils behind 'em began to pour volleys on us from the breastwork. Four of them Russians closed round the Colonel, and he'd nothing but his sword against their cursed bayonets. I closed with one on 'em; he was as hard as death to grip with. The Colonel killed two of 'em off hand, though they was twice as big as he, but the third, just as his arm was lifted, ran him right through the left lung. Then he fell straight down, Major, and I was a going to fight my way to him and carry him off in my arms, and I *would* ha' done it, sir, too, but the Russians pressed so hard on the front ranks that they pushed us straight off the parapet, and I only caught a sight of the Colonel lifting himself up on his elbow, and waving us on with a smile—God bless him!—and then I fell over into the ditch, with Pat O'Leary a-top of me, and I see him no more, Major, and he must be dead, sir, or else a prisoner in that d—d city."

And honest Kennedy, whose feeling had carried him beyond recollection of delicate language or other presence than his own, stopped abruptly. In his own words, he "felt like a fool," for Curly, like Eman of the 41st, was loved by all the men who served under him.

De Vigne set his teeth hard as he listened. Memories of his Frestonhills pet thronged upon him; the little fellow who had been so eager for his notice, so proud of his patronage; the merry, light-hearted child, with his golden locks and his fearless spirits; the wild young Cantab; the dandy Guardsman; the warm, true, honest heart, unstained by the world he lived in; the friend, the rival! Poor little Curly!—and he was lying yonder, behind those smoking ramparts wounded and a prisoner—perhaps dead!

For an instant De Vigne's eyes flashed with eagle glance over the stormed city, lying there grim and gaunt, in the shadow of the grey-hued day; I believe he would not have hesitated to cross those death-strewn lines alone, and rescue Curly or fall with him.

The Crimea is not so far distant but the world knows how we were awakened, the morning after, by the Russian general's masterly retreat, by thunder louder than that which had stunned our ears for twelve months long, by the explosion of the Flagstaff and Garden batteries, by his tramp of those dense columns of Russian infantry passing

to the opposite side, by the glare of the flames from Fort Nicholas, by the huge columns of black smoke rising from Fort Paul, by the sight of that fair and stately Empress of the Euxine abandoned and in flames. Little did the people at home—hearing Litanies read and hymns sung in the village churches among the fresh English woodlands—dream what a grand funeral mass for our dead was shaking the earth with its echoes that Sabbath morning in the Crimea.

It was as late as Wednesday before De Vigne and I got passes from the Adjutant-General's office, and went into the town before whose granite ramparts we had lain watching and waiting for twelve weary months. What a road it was through the French works! A very fair Rosamond's maze of trenches, zig-zags, and parallels, across the sap, threading our way through the heaps of dead, where the men lay so thickly one on the other, just as they had fallen, shoulder to shoulder, till we were inside the Malakoff.

Four piles of dead were heaped together like broken meat on a butcher's stall—not a whit more tenderly—and cleared out of the way like carrion; the ground was broken up into great pools of blood, black and noisome; troops of flies were swarming like mimic vultures on bodies still warm, on men still conscious, crowding over the festering wounds (for these men had lain there since Saturday at noon!), buzzing their death-rattle in ears already maddened with torture. *That* was what we saw in the Malakoff, what we saw a little later in the Great Redan, where among cook-houses brimful of human blood, English and Russian lay clasped together in a fell embrace, petrified by death; where the British lay in heaps, mangled beyond recognition by their dearest friends, or scorched and blackened by the recent explosions; and where—how strange they looked there!—there stood outside the entrance of one of the houses, a vase of flowers and a little canary!

But we did not stay to notice the once white and stately city, now black and broken with our shot: we went straight on towards Fort Paul, as yet untouched, where stood the hospital, that chamber of horrors, that worse than charnel-house, from which strong men retreated, unable to bear up against the loathsome terrors it enclosed. That long low room, with its arched roof, its square pillars, its dim, caver-

nous light coming in through the shattered windows, was a sight worse than all the fabled horrors of painter, or poet, or author; full of torment—torment to which the cruellest torture of Domitian or Nero were mercy—a hell where human frames were racked with every possible agony, not as a chastisement for sin, but as a reward for heroism! De Vigne, used as he had been to death and pain, closed his eyes involuntarily as he entered. There they lay, packed as closely together as dead animals in a slaughter-house—the many Russians, the few English soldiers, who had been dragged there after the assault, to die as they might; they would but have cumbered the retreat, and their lives were valueless now! There they lay; some on the floor that was slippery with blood like a shamble; some on pallets saturated with the stream that carried away their life in its deadly flow; some on straw, crimson and noisome, the home of the most horrible vermin; some dead hastily flung down to be out of the way, black and swollen, a mass of putrefaction, the eyes forced from the sockets, the tongue protruding, the features distended in hideous grotesqueness: others dead, burnt and charred in the explosion, a heap of blanched bones and gory clothes and blackened flesh, the men who but a few hours before had been instinct with health and hope and gallant fearless life! Living men in horrible companionship with these corpses, writhing in torture which there was no hand to relieve, no help from heaven or earth to aid, with their jagged and broken limbs twisted and powerless, were calling for water, for help, for pity; shrieking out in wild delirium or disconnected prayer the name of the woman they had loved or the God who had forsaken them, or rolling beneath their wretched beds in the agony of pain and thirst which had driven them to madness, glaring out upon us with the piteous helplessness of a hunted animal, or the ferocious unconsciousness of insanity.

We passed through one of these chambers of terrors, our hearts sickened and our senses reeling at the hideous sight, the intolerable stench, that met us at every step. Great God! what must those have endured who lay there days and nights with not a drop of water to soften their baked throats, not a kind touch to bind up their gaping wounds, not a human voice to whisper pity for their anguish; before

their dying eyes scenes to make a strong man reel and stagger, and in their dying ears the shrieks of suffering equal to their own, the thunder of exploding magazines, the shock of falling fortresses, the burst of shells falling through the roof, the hiss and crash and roar of the flaming city round them!

We passed through one chamber in which we saw no one who could be Curly, or at least who we could believe was he; for few of the faces there could have been recognised by their nearest and their dearest, since not Edith's quest of Harold wanted so keen an eye of love as was needed to seek for friend or brother in the hospital of Sebastopol.

We entered a second room, where the sights and the odours were yet more appalling than in the first. Beside one pallet De Vigne paused and bent down! then his dark bronze cheek grew white, and he dropped on his knee beside the wretched bed—at last he had found Curly. Curly! still alive, in that scene of misery, lying on the mattress that was soaked through with his life-blood, the wound in his shoulder open and festering, his eyes closed, his bright hair dull and damp with the dew of suffering that stood upon his brow, his face of a livid blue-white hue; the gay, gallant, chivalrous English gentleman, thrown down to die, as he would not have had a dog left in its suffering. On one side of him was a black charred corpse, swollen in one place, burnt to the bone in another; the woman that loved him best could not have known that hideous mass! On the other side of him, close by, was a young Russian officer but just dead, with his hands, small and fair as a girl's, filled with the straw that he had clutched at in his death-agony; and between these two dead men lay Curly.

De Vigne knelt down beside him, lifting his head upon his arm. "My God, Arthur, is he dead?"

At the familiar voice his eyes unclosed, first with a dreamy vacant stare in them—his mother's heart would have broken at the wreck of beauty in that face, so fair so delicate, but a few days before!

"Curly, Curly, dear old fellow!—don't you know me?"

Curly looked at him dreamily, unconsciously. "What! is that the prayer-bell? Is the Doctor waiting?"

His thoughts were back among the old school-days at Frestonhills, when we first met at the old Chancery—when we little thought how we were doomed to part under the murderous shadow of Fort Paul.

De Vigne bent nearer to him. "Look at me, dear old boy. You must know *me*, Curly."

But he did not; his head tossed wearily from side to side, the fever of his wounds had mounted to his brain, and he moaned out delirious, disconnected words.

"Why don't they form into line, Kennedy—why don't they form into line? If there were more of us, we could take that breastwork. Water?—water! Is there not a drop of water *anywhere?* We shall die of thirst. I should like to die in harness, but it is hard to die of thirst like a mad dog—like a mad dog—ha! ha!" (Both of us shuddered, as the mocking, hideous laughter rang through the chamber of death.) "Alma! Who talked of Alma? Can't you bring her here before I die? I think she would be kinder to me now, perhaps; I loved her very much; she did not care for me—she loves De Vigne. You know how I have hated him—my God! how I have hated him—and yet—Oh, for mercy, sake, give me water—water for the love of Heaven!"

At the muttered raving words De Vigne's face grew as livid for the moment as that of the dead Russian beside him, and his hand trembled as he took a flask from his belt that he had filled with brandy before starting, and held it to Curly's lips. How eagerly he drank and drank, as if life and reason would flow back to him with that draught! For a time it gave him strength to fling off the faintness and delirium fastening upon him, his eyes grew clearer and softer, and as De Vigne raised him into a sitting posture, and supported him on his arm with all the gentle care of a woman, he revived a little, and looked at him with a conscious and grateful regard.

"De Vigne! How do you come here! Where am I? Oh! I know; is the city taken, then?"

Dying as he was, the old spirit in him rallied and flashed up for a brief moment, while De Vigne told him how the Russians had retreated, leaving Sebastopol in flames. But he was too far gone to revive long; he lay with his head resting on De Vigne's arm, his eyelids closed again, his

breathing faint and quick, all his beauty, and his manhood, and his strength, stricken down into the saddest wreck that human eyes can see and human passions cause. Few could have recognised him in the wounded wretch who was stretched on that gore-stained pallet, with his life ebbing away simply for want of that common care that a friendless beggar would have been given at home.

"Is the city won?" he asked again; his low and feeble words scarcely heard in the shrieks, the moans, the muttered prayers, the groans, the oaths around him.

"Yes; they have abandoned it to us," De Vigne answered, not heeding the pestilence of which the air was reeking, and from which many a man as strong as he had turned heart-sick away.

"I am glad of that," said Curly dreamily. "England is sure to win; she is never beaten, is she? I should like to fight once more for her, but I never shall, old fellow; the days here—how many are they?—have done for me. It is hard to die like this, De Vigne?" And a shudder ran through his frame, that was quivering with every torture. "But tell my mother I die quite content, quite happy. Tell her not to regret me, I have thought of her often, very often—and bid my father if he loves me, to be kinder to Gus—Gus was a good old boy, though we made game of him."

Curly paused; slowly and painfully as he had spoken, the exertion was greater than his fading strength could bear; he, three days before, full of manly vigour, grace, and beauty, was powerless as a new-born child, helpless as a paralysed old man; stricken down like a gracious and beautiful cedar-tree by the hacking strokes of the wood man's axe, its life crushed, its glory withered, only to be piled amidst a heap of others to make the bonfires for a conqueror's ovation!

De Vigne bent over him, his cheek growing whiter as he thought of the boy's early promise and sunny boyhood, and of the man's death, amid such horror, filth, and desolation as England would have shuddered to compel her paupers, her convicts, nay, the very unowned dogs about her streets, to suffer in; yet made small count of having forced on her heroes, to die in like murrained cattle.

"Curly, dear Curly," he whispered, pushing off the

clammy hair from Brandling's forehead as gently as any woman, "why talk of death? Once out of this d—d hole, you will get well, old fellow; you SHALL get well. We shall have many a day together still at home."

Curly smiled faintly:

"No! I do not die from the wounds; what has killed me, De Vigne"—and at the memory the old delirious vagueness grew over his eyes, which wandered away into the depths of his dire prison-house—"have been the sights, the scents, the sounds. Oh, my God, the horrors I have seen! In sermons we used to hear them try sometimes to describe a hell; if those preachers had been here as I have been, they would have seen we don't want devils to help us make one—men are quite enough! The stench, the ravings, the roar of the flames round us, the vile creeping things, the blasphemy, the prayers, the horrible thirst—O God! I *prayed* for madness; prayed for it as I never prayed for anything in all my life before, and yet, I am no coward either!"

He stopped again, a deathly grey spread over his face, and a cold shiver ran through him; the brain, last of all to die, the part immortal and vital amidst so much death, triumphed yet awhile over the dissolution of the body. Curly knew that he was dying fast, and signed De Vigne down nearer still to him.

"When the war is over, and you go back to England, first of all try and seek out Alma."

The fierce red blood crimsoned De Vigne's very brow; had it been a living and not a dying man who had dared to breathe that name to him, he would have provoked a reply he would have little cared to hear. All the mad passion, all the infinite tenderness there were in his heart for his lost love, rose up at the abrupt mention of her.

"Will you promise me?" asked Curly; "to give me peace in my death-hour, promise me."

"No," said De Vigne, between his teeth, clenched like an iron vice. "I cannot promise you. Why should you wish me? You loved her yourself—"

"*Because* I loved her myself, because I love her still; love her so well, that is the thought that in my grave I shall never hear her voice, never see her eyes, *never meet her again*, that makes me shrink from death," said Curly;

an unutterable tenderness and despair in those faint broken tones whose last utterance was Alma's name. "*I do* love her, too well to believe what you believe, that she is Castleton's mistress."

De Vigne's hands clenched the straw of the pallet like a man in bodily agony.

"For God's sake be silent! Do not drive *me* to madness. Do you think I should believe it without proof?—"

"On the spur of anger and jealousy you *might*. I do not know, I cannot tell, but I could never think her capable of falsehood, or dishonour," whispered Curly, his breath growing shorter, his eyes more dim, though even on his haggard cheek a flush just rose, wavered, and died out, as he went on: "The day she—she—rejected me I accused her of her love for you, and then she answered me as a woman would hardly have done if she had not cared for you very dearly. Before I left England I left all I had to her; it is little enough, but it will keep her from want. Let some one seek her out, even though she were sunk in the lowest shame, and see that they give her my money. It will save her from the wild abyss to which Castleton would leave her to sink down as she might—as she must. Promise me, De Vigne—or you, Chevasney—promise me, or I cannot die in peace."

"No, no, *I* promise you."

Hoarse and low as De Vigne's voice was, Curly heard it, a look of gratitude came into the eyes once so bright and fearless, now so dim and dull.

"And if you find that she does love you, you will not reward her for her love as we have done too many?"

Whiter and whiter yet grew De Vigne's face, as his hands clenched harder on the straw of Curly's bed; it was some moments before he spoke:

"I *dare* not promise that. God help me!"

But his words fell on ears deaf at last to the harsh fret and bustle of the world: the faintness of that terrible last struggle of brain and body with the coming chill of death, had crept over poor Curly. Sudden shiverings seized him the mind, vanquished at last, began to wander from earth—whither who can dare to say?—dark blue shadows deepened under his hollow eyes, the life in him still lingered, as though loth to leave the form so brief a space ago full of

such beautiful youth, such gracious manhood. To watch it flickering, struggling, growing fainter and fainter, ebbing away so slowly, so surely, dying out painfully, reluctantly; and to know that it might all have been spared by the common care that at home would be given to a horse—to a dog! God knows, there are sights and thoughts in this world that might well turn men to fiends! He gave one sigh, one heavy sigh deep drawn, and turned upon his side: "My mother—Alma!" Those were the last words he uttered; then—all light died out of his eyes, and the life so young, so brave, so gallant, had fled away for ever.

De Vigne bent over the reeking straw that was now the funeral bier of as loyal a heart as ever spent itself in England's cause; and bitter tears, wrung from his proud eyes, fell on the cold brow, and the rigid features that never more would light up with the kind, fond, fearless smile of friendship, truth, and welcome.

"I loved him," he muttered. "God help me! Such is ever my fate! My mother—Alma—Curly—*all* lost; and no bullet will come to me!"

In his own arms De Vigne bore Curly out from the loathsome charnel-house, where the living had been entombed with the dead. We buried him with many another, as loyal and gallant as he, who had died on the slope of the Great Redan; and we gave him a soldier's gravestone; a plain white wood cross with his name and his regiment marked upon it, such as were planted thick in those two long years, on the hills and valleys of the Crimea. God knows if it be there now, or if the Russian peasant have struck it down and levelled the little mound with his ploughshare and the hoofs of his heavy oxen. We have left him in his distant grave. England, whom he remembered in his death-hour, has forgotten him long ere this. Like many another soldier lying in the green sierras of Spain, among the pathless jungle of the tropics, amidst the golden corn of Waterloo, and the white headstones upon Cathcart's-hill; the country for which he fell scarcely heard his name, and never heeded his fate. There he lies in his distant grave, the white and gleaming City he died to win stately and restored to all her ancient beauty; the waters of the Alma rolling through its vineyard as peacefully as though no streams of blood had ever mingled with

The Molyneux had come to winter in Paris. Corallyne, though it looked well enough in Burke, was utterly uninhabitable; London was out of the question till March, and the Viscountess, tired of travelling, and bored with the Bads, had taken a suite in an hotel in the Champs Elysées, where she contrived to spend her days tolerably pleasantly, especially as there was a remarkably handsome Confessor, who gave her unusual piquancy in her religious excitements, and made her think seriously, of the duties of auricular confession. (It is commonly said that women make the best devotees—doubtless for causes too lengthy to enter upon here—but I wonder, if religions had no priests how many of their fairer disciples would they retain?) And now, Lady Molyneux had another object in life—to woo Prince Carl for her daughter. Bent on that purpose, she tried to make the Hôtel Clâcy very delightful to him, and succeeded. Violet paid him no attention—barely as much as courtesy dictated to a man of his rank and to her father's guest—but he cared nothing for conversation, and as long as she sat there, however haughtily silent, and he could admire her *belle taille* as he liked, he wished for no words, though he might have desired a few smiles. Still she was the first woman who had neglected him, and to men as courted as the Austrian this is a better spur than any, and he really grew interested when he found it not so easy "*de la faire oublier.*"

"*C'est en bon train,*" thought my lady; "if only Violet were more tractable, and Sabretasche would not write!"—would not *live* was in her thoughts, but naturally so religiously-minded a woman could hardly "murder with a wish," and having no other weapons than her natural ones of tongue and thought, she planned out a series of ingenious persecutions against her daughter till she should have induced her to marry.

"My dear Violet, oblige me with a few minutes' conve sation," said my lady, one morning.

Violet looked up and followed her passively; her manner was as soft and gentle as of old—even gentler still to those about her—but the chill of her great grief was upon her, and her mother's persistence had taught her a somewhat haughty reserve, quite foreign to her nature, in defence not only of herself, but of the allegiance, which she never

attempted to conceal, but she gave to him as faithfully as though he had been her husband.

"My dear Violet," began the Viscountess, seating herself opposite to her daughter in her own room, "may I ask whether you absolutely intend dedicating all your days to Vivian Sabretasche? Do you really mean to devote yourself to maidenhood all your life because one man happens not to be able to marry you?"

The colour rose on Violet's brow; the sensitive wound shrank at any touch; and my Lady Molyneux, religious and gentle woman though she was, could use Belgravian Billingsgate on occasion.

"Why do you renew that subject? You know as well as I, that I shall never marry. It is a subject which concerns no one but myself, and I have told you, once for all, that I hold myself as fully bound to him as if the vows we hoped to take had passed between us?"

Her voice trembled as she spoke, though her teeth were set together. The Viscountess sighed and sneered.

"Then do you mean that you will refuse Regalia?"

"I have refused him."

"You have!" And my lady, with a smile, drank a little eau-de-Cologne by way of refreshment after hearing such a statement. "I suppose you know, Violet, that you will have no money; that if you do not make a good match now you are young and pretty, nobody will take you when you are the dowerless *passée* daughter of a penniless Irish peer? And Vallenstein-Seidlitz, may I inquire if you have refused *him*, too?"

"He has not given me the opportunity; if he do, I shall."

"If he do, you will? You must be mad—absolutely mad!" cried her mother, too horrified for expression. "Don't you know that there is not a girl in the English or the French empire who would not take such an offer as his, and accept it with thanksgiving?"

"O yes! I could not sell myself to better advantage!"

"Sell yourself," repeated the peeress. Fine ladies are not often fond of hearing things called by their proper names.

"Yes, sell myself," repeated Violet, bitterly, leaning against the mantelpiece, with a painful smile upon her lips. "Would you not put me up to auction, knock me

down to the highest bidder? Marriage is the mart, mothers the auctioneers, and he who bids the highest wins. Women are like racers, brought up only to run for Cups, and win handicaps for their owners."

"Nonsense!" said her mother impatiently. "You have lost your senses, I think. There is no question of 'selling,' as you term it. Marriage is a social compact, of course, where alliances suitable in position, birth, and wealth, are studied. Why should you pretend to be wiser than all the rest of the world? Most amiable and excellent women have married without thinking love a necessary ingredient. Why should you object to a good alliance if it be a *mariage de convenance?*

"Because I consider a *mariage de convenance* the most gross of all social falsehood! You prostitute the most sacred vows and outrage the closest ties; you carry a lie to your husband's heart and home. You marry him for his money or his rank, and simulate an attachment for him that you know to be hypocrisy. You stand before God's altar with an untruth upon your lips, and either share an unhallowed barter, or deceive and trick an affection that loves and honours you. The Quadroon girl sold in the slave-market is not so utterly polluted, as the woman free, educated, and enlightened, who barters herself for a 'marriage for position.'"

Something of her old passionate eloquence was roused in her, as she spoke with contempt and bitterness. Her heart was sick of the follies and conventionalities which surrounded her, so meshing her in that it needed both spirit and endurance to keep free and true amidst them all. Lady Molyneux was silent for a minute, possibly in astonishment at this novel view of that usual desideratum—a marriage for position.

"My dear Violet, your views are very singular—very extraordinary. You are much too free of thought. If you had listened to me once before, you would never have had the misery of your present unhappy infatuation. The eye of society is upon you; you must act with dignity; society demands it of you. You must not disgrace your family by pining after a married man. It was very sad, I know—very sad that affair; and I dare say you were very attached to him. Everybody knows he was a most handsome,

gifted, fascinating creature, though, alas! utterly unprincipled. Still, I think your first feeling should have been one of intense thankfulness at being preserved from the fate you might have had. Only fancy if his wife had not declared her claims before your marriage with him! Only fancy, what your position in society would have been! Every one would have pitied you, of course, but not a creature could have visited you!"

The silent scorn in her daughter's eyes made her pause; she could not but read the contempt of her own doctrines in them, which Violet felt too deeply to put into words.

"I have no doubt it was a very great trial," she continued hurriedly; "I am not denying that, of course; still, what I mean is, that your duty, your moral duty, Violet, was, as soon as you found that Vivian Sabretasche was the husband of another, to do your very utmost to forget him, certainly not to foster and cherish his memory as persistently and wilfully as you do. It is an entire twelvemonth since you parted from him, and yet, instead of trying to banish all remembrance of your unhappy engagement and breaking entirely with him, you keep up a correspondence with him—more foolish your father to allow it!—and obstinately refuse to form a more fortunate attachment, and marry well. I tell you that your affection, however legitimate its commencement, became wrong, *morally wrong*, as soon as you learned that he was married to another woman."

At last the Viscountess paused for breath; the scorn which had been gathering deeper and deeper in Violet's face burst into words; she lifted her head, that her mother might not see the thick blinding tears that gathered in her eyes:

"A sin? You cannot mean what you say? The sin, if you like, were indeed to forsake him and forget him; *that* were a crime, of which, if I were capable, you would indeed have reason to blush for me. When I knew him, worthy of every sacrifice that any woman could make him, so true and generous that he chose misery for himself rather than falsehood towards me, am I then to turn round and say to him, 'Because you cannot marry me—in other words, contribute to my own aggrandisement, and flatter my own self-love, I choose to forget all that has passed between us, to

ignore all the fidelity I once vowed to you, and sell whatever charms I have to some buyer free to bid a better price for them?'"

The satiric bitterness in her tone stung her mother into shame, or as faint an approach to it as she could feel, and, like most people, she covered an indefensible argument with vague irritation.

"Really, Violet, your tone is highly unbecoming; I have absolutely no patience with your folly—!"

Violet stopped her with a gesture as of physical suffering, but with a dignity in her face that awed even her mother into silence.

"Not even you shall ever apply such a term to any devotion I can show to him. He is worthy all the love of a woman far nobler and better than I ever shall be. I promised him my allegiance once when the world smiled upon our love; because the world now frowns instead, do you suppose that I shall withdraw it? Do not torture me any more with this cruel discussion; it is ended once for all. I shall *never* marry; it will always be as useless to urge me as it is useless now. God knows whether we may ever meet again; but, living or dead, I am for ever bound to him."

Every vestige of colour fled from her face as she spoke: her fingers were clasped together till her rings cut into the skin; and there was that in her voice, which might have touched into sympathy, even the coldest nature. But (I do not think one can blame my Lady Molyneux; if she was born without feelings, perhaps she was hardly more responsible for the non-possession of them, than the idiot for the total absence of brain) her mother was not even silenced.

"Is that your final decision?" she said, with a sneer. "Very well, then! I will tell Vallenstein that my daughter intends to lead a semi-conventual life, with the celibacy, but not the holy purpose, of a nun, because she is dying for a handsome *roué* who happens to be a married man. I dare say he will enjoy telling the story at the Tuileries; and there are plenty of women, my love, who will like nothing better than a laugh against *you*."

"You can say what you please," answered Violet, between her teeth.

But that she was her mother, the Viscountess would have had a far sharper retort.

"Of course I can? And stories grow strangely in passing from mouth to mouth! Dear me, is it three o'clock? And I was to be at Notre-Dame by half-past, to hear that divine creature, Alexis Dupont!" And my lady floated out of the room, while her daughter leant her head upon the mantelpiece, the tears she had forced back while in her mother's presence falling hot and thick on the chill marble —not more chill than the natures that surrounded her in the gay world of which she was weary. Her heart was sick within her, the burden of her life grew heavier than she knew how to bear.

How long she stood there she did not know, till hands as soft as her own touched hers, a face as fair as her own was lifted to hers, a voice whispered, "Why are you in pain? For you, of all, life should be bright and beautiful!"

Violet Molyneux stooped and touched with her lips the brow that had once flushed beneath De Vigne's caresses.

"Alma, tell me, what do you call fidelity?"

"Fidelity?" repeated Alma, with that instantaneous flash of responsive feeling on her mobile features which it had been De Vigne's pleasure to summon up and watch at his will. "There is little of it in the world, I fancy. A marriage is to me null and void without fidelity, not only of act, but of thought, of mind, of heart; and fidelity makes in God's sight a marriage tie holier than any man can forge, and one which no human laws can sever. What do I call fidelity? I think it is to keep faithful through good report and evil report, through suffering, and, if need be, through shame; it is to credit no evil of the one loved from other lips, and if told that such evil is true by his own, to blot it out as though it never had been; to keep true to him through all appearance, however against him, through silence, and absence, and trial; never to forsake him even by one thought, and to brave all the world to serve him; that is what seems fidelity to me,—nothing less—nothing less!"

Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered. A tender love, an undying sorrow, were spoken on her face, as, turned full to Violet, the sunlight fell upon it.

Violet looked at her and sighed; she was too unselfish not to regret, even amidst her own sorrow, that another should share a similar fate; and she felt little doubt either

that De Vigne cared nothing for his former protégée, or that he had left her, with his love spoken but his marriage told. She liked the depth of feeling and delicacy of nature which had made Alma hold her attachment to him too sacredly to speak of it, and hear his name, when it was occasionally mentioned in the Molyneux circle, without betraying "the secret wound beneath the cloak" loving the hand that had given that wound too well to murmur to others at its pain. The similarity of their fate touched her. She stooped over Alma and passed her hand over the golden hair that De Vigne had drawn through his fingers—those shining silken threads that had held him closer than chains of iron.

"You are right! We must give 'nothing less.'"

This was all that passed between them, then or afterwards on what lay nearest to the hearts of both, yet that little was enough to awake a close sympathy between them, none the less real because it was silent. To Alma life was very bitter now. Twelve months had passed, and she was still as far from De Vigne as when she lay chained to her sick bed. The letter she had written at Montressor's had miscarried; De Vigne had never had it. Hearing nothing from him, she had written again—a letter which would have touched a heart far harder and more steeled against her than his. That letter she received back, sealed again, and directed to her in a writing which she knew but too well, firmly, boldly, with not a trace allowed to appear in the clear caligraphy of the agony in which the words were penned. She knew *then* that he believed her false to him; that the circumstantial evidence which had told so strongly against her had crushed out all faith and trust and tenderness in his heart towards her. It was the most cruel wound Alma had ever had, to find herself so readily doubted, so harshly given up, so unjustly denied even a hearing. Injustice was always very bitter to her; it roused all that was dark and fiery in her character. From anybody else she would never have forgotten or pardoned it; certainly never have stooped to clear herself from it. De Vigne she forgave, and thought less of her own wrong than of all she knew that he endured.

Alma, with all her impulsiveness and expansiveness, was sensitive to all touch of those more delicate feelings that she

sheltered in her heart; over them she was haughty, proud, reserved. She had, moreover, great self control. De Vigne's name was too dear to her to be breathed before others. She had resided twelve months with the Molyneux; and they never knew, though he was often mentioned casually, that his name merely spoken by another's voice struck like steel to her heart.

Alma's principles of honour and of trust were far more acute and refined than those of most people; the love De Vigne had lavished on her was sacred to her; a treasure reposed in her alone, not to be spread out before other eyes. Violet,—the only one who would have translated the dilated terror of her eyes when the morning papers came in, the anguish of her face when she bent over the Returns of the killed and wounded, the gleam of her eyes whenever De Vigne's name was mentioned by any man who had come back from the Crimea from ill-health or to bring despatches,—Violet was too absorbed in her own thoughts to notice what passed beside her, or at least to reflect upon it. She was kind to her, as she would have been to any one in a subordinate situation; still more so one to whom she had always had a certain attraction, ever since she had heard of her as the artist of the Louis Dix-Sept. But until the moment when Alma's definition of fidelity unwittingly betrayed her, Violet had noticed her but little, and never discovered her secret.

It was a peculiar position that Alma occupied in the Molyneux household in Paris. The Hon. Rushbrooke, admiring her *chevelure dorée*, had thought he could make much the same love to her as to his mother's maid, whenever that soubrette chanced to be a pretty one; and Lady Molyneux had scarcely ever spoken to her, save when, struck with her great taste in dress, she would fain have had her turned into a sort of *chef de toilette*. But Jockey Jack vowed she was as much of a lady as any of them; swore he'd known Tressillian in early days; by George, he *would* have them civil to the little girl, and was civil to her himself, in his bluff, blunt, kindly-meant way; and Violet, won towards her as months passed on, sought refuge in her society from the inanities, frivolities, scandals, and manœuvres constantly poured into her ears by her mother, and from the whirl of a circle whose gaieties were now so foreign

to her, until a tacit sympathy and a sincere regard grew up between them—the friendless artist and the fashionable aristocrate.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE TORTURES OF TANTALUS.

It was Christmas night—Christmas-eve—and the midnight mass was rising and falling in its solemn chant through the long aisles of Notre Dame. The incense floated upwards to the dim vaulted roof, the starry lights glittered on the gorgeous high altar, while the sweet swell of the cathedral choir rose on the still, hushed air, as through Paris, under the winter stars, there tolled one by one the twelve strokes of the midnight hour.

Midnight mass in Notre Dame!—it were hard to hear it bursting in its glorious harmony, after the dead silence of the assembled multitude, once from priest and people, choir and altar, without something of that sadness and that veneration which lie in most of us, though too often lost and silenced in the fret and hurry of our life.

One by one the midnight strokes tolled slowly out upon the Christmas air; hushed as though no human heart beat amongst them, the gathered thousands knelt in prayer; the last stroke fell and lingered on their ears, and then, over their bowed heads, rolled the rich cadence of the choir and the full swell of the organ-notes. Among the multitude knelt Violet Molyneux and Alma, their thoughts far from creeds or formularies, from religious differences or religious credulities, but their hearts bowed in prayer for those far distant. What was to them church, place, creed? thus they prayed in the solitude of their own chambers; thus they would have prayed beside the sick-beds of Scutari; thus they now prayed in the hushed aisles of Notre Dame, where, if forms differed, human hearts at least beat beside them and around with hopes, fears, griefs, passions, pleading for mercy, as in theirs!

As they passed out of the great door to the carriage, in the frosty starlit night, both started, and a voice whispered by their side:

"*Per Carità! date la limosina per amor del Figlio di Dio!*"

They scarcely saw the beggar's face, coming out of the gas glare into the moonlit night, but they heard the voice, broken, almost fierce—perhaps with hunger!—in its supplication, and both instinctively, and contrary to the custom of either, stretched out their hands with an alms on Christmas-eve. As it chanced, Alma was the nearer to the supplicant, who caught her offered gift, but did not see Violet's. The crowd following, pushed them on; and their carriage rolled away, while the woman, with Alma's coin in her hand, looked after them with a strange expression on her haggard face, partly curiosity, partly hate, partly fear, yet with a tinge of regret and pain, as she muttered in Tuscan:

"*Santa Maria! questo sorriso mi fa pensare di gli! E presagio della morte—ma—per chi?*"

The wild gaze of the Italian's fierce dark eyes, the haunting tone of that shrill "Carita! Carita!" still lingered in Alma's mind as she rolled through the gay gas-lighted streets of Paris; and her young eyes closed with a despairing sigh, and a sickening shudder of dread at this mysterious Human Life, which is so short in years, so long in suffering.

The Paris winter passed; passed as Paris winters ever do, with a gay whirl of glittering life for the rich, with cold and hunger and suffering for the poor; the gas flowers of Mabille, burning at the same hour with the candle that gleamed its sickly light on the dead bodies at the Morgue. The Paris winter passed, and Violet Molyneux was still the empress of its soirées; that chill hauteur which in self-defence she had assumed, was no barrier between her and the love that was pressed upon her from all quarters and highest ranks, evident though it was by her equable coldness to all, that her exquisite loveliness would never be given to any. In February, Lord Molyneux received a letter with the stately royal seal of the Vallenstein-Seidlitz, requesting the honour of his daughter's hand. It came to him when they were at dinner; even with the length of the table between them, his wife knew, or thought she knew, the armorial bearings of the seal, as it lay upwards unopened, and congratulated herself, though

with a rapid cast forwards as to how many hundreds the trousseau would cost; but the trousseau would be one final expense, and Violet's dress in the present state of things was an annual destruction of what without her my lady would have had for her own silks and laces, jewellery and point. As they took their coffee, preparatory to going to a ball at the British Embassy, Jockey Jack broke the seal, perused the missive, and in silence handed it to his daughter. Violet read it, with pain, for she foresaw that she should not be allowed to reject this, as she had done others, without contention and upbraiding; and gave it back to him as silently, but the thin, jewelled hand of her mother intercepted it, with a snappish sneer:

"Is your own wife, Lord Molyneux, to be excluded from all your confidences with your daughter?"

"What answer, Vy?" said Jockey Jack, turning a deaf ear to his lady, who had a knack of bringing forward her relationship to him on any disagreeable occasion, such as opening his notes or referring her creditors to him, but on all others ignored it very completely.

"The same as usual, papa," answered Violet, bending down to him.

Lady Molyneux read Vallenstein's formal and courtly letter with calm deliberation through her gold eye-glass; and Alma rose and left the room, guessing, with intuitive tact and delicacy of perception, that this was some matter which they would prefer to discuss alone. Lady Molyneux read the letter, then folded it up and put it in its envelope.

"Violet, would it be too much for me to ask to be allowed to share the confidence you gave your papa just now? Might I inquire what reply you sent to Vallenstein?"

Violet gave one sigh of inexpressible weariness; she was so tired of this ceaseless contention, the continual dropping of water on a stone; this jangling and upbraiding; the martyrdom of daily petty badgering and polished vituperation.

"Certainly you may, mamma. I thank Prince Cari for the honour he has done me; and I reject his offer with all the gratitude for his generosity that it merits."

Lady Molyneux shrugged her shoulders, and did not

condescend to answer her. She turned to her husband, who was beating an impatient tattoo on the back of his couch.

"My dear Molyneux, do *you* intend, too, to refuse Prince Carl's proposals?"

Jockey Jack looked up with a curse on women's tongues, and on their tomfoolery of marriage and giving in marriage, ready to dissent from his wife at a moment's notice.

"Vallenstein does not propose for *me*, my dear. I have nothing to do with it, except to tell him, as decently as I can, that Vy is very much obliged to him, but would rather be excused."

"Then you mean to countenance her in her folly?"

"I don't know what you mean by countenancing her; she is old enough to judge for herself, especially about her own husband. I dare say a royal marriage would have had great attractions for you, Helena, but if your daughter thinks differently, there is no reason for you to quarrel about it," said Jockey Jack, who did not see why one man was not as good as another to Violet, nor yet, if they were not, why she should be bullied about it.

"*I* see one if you do not," said his wife frigidly. "It is of the greatest importance that she should marry soon and marry well. The singularly unfortunate circumstances that attended her lamentable engagement—an engagement that would never have been entered into if I had been listened to—have laid her open to a great deal of remark, never beneficial to any woman—"

"Do you speak feelingly?" interrupted Lord Molyneux, *sotto voce*.

"Indeed, very prejudicial," continued his wife, imperturbably. "Violet has now been out three years; girls that were débutantes with her have settled well long ago. Beatrice Carteret, with not a tithe of her advantages, married the Duke of St. Orme in her first season; and that remarkably ordinary little Selina Albany drew Whitebait into a proposal, and he settled a hundred thousand upon her for pin-money—"

"That'll do, that'll do," cut in Molyneux impatiently, "St. Orme is an old brute, who bullied his first wife into consumption, and as for Whitebait, he's a young fool whom his uncle tried to get shut up for idiotcy; if Vy

can't do better than that, I would rather she lived and died a Molyneux. If you've no better arguments for marriage, Helena—"

"At all events," said my lady, with her nastiest sneer, "they would either of them make as good husbands as your favourite would have done with a wife *in petto!* She has been immensely admired; she has made more conquests, I have no doubt, than any woman of her years; but men will not go and recount their own rejections; other ladies will not believe me when I tell them whom she might have married—very naturally, too—and all the world knows of her is her devotion to a married man! I leave it to her own sense to determine, whether that is a very advantageous report to cling to her in circles, where women dislike her as their rival, and men whom she has rejected are not very likely to be over-merciful in their terms of speaking of her. Of course it is all hushed when I draw near, but I have overheard more than one remark very detrimental to her. In a little time men will become very shy of making one their wife, whose name has been so long in connection with a married man's, and whose ridiculous *dévouement* to Colonel Sabretasche has been the most amusing theme in salons where he has been so famous for love not quite so constant! Therefore, I say it is most important she should marry soon, and marry well; and to reject such proposals as Prince Carl's would be madness—a man who could wed, if he chose, with one of the royal houses of Europe! A letter of refusal shall never be sent to Vallenstein."

"Ah! well, I'm sure I don't know," said poor Jockey Jack, bewildered with this lengthened lecture. "Come, Vy, your mamma speaks reasonably—for once! You know I am very much attached to Sabretasche—very much—and I admit you don't see any other man so handsome or so accomplished, and all that sort of thing; and he was deuced mad about you, poor fellow! But then, you see, as long as there's that confounded wife of his in the way, and her life's just as good as his, he can't marry you, with our devilish laws; and, ten to one if ever the time come that he can, he won't care a straw about you—that's very much the way with us men—and you'll have wasted all your youth and your beauty for nothing, my poor pet! You see, we are not rich, and if you were well married—it's most

women's ambition, at the least! Come, Vy, what do you say?"

Violet rose and leaned against the console, with her head erect, her little pearly teeth set tight, her lips closed in a haughty, scornful curve over them, her face very pale—pale, but resolute, as Eponina's or Gertrude von der Wart's—and I think the martyrdom of endurance is worse than the martyrdom of action!

"I say what I am weary of saying—that it is useless, and will ever be useless, to urge me to the sin of infidelity, which you raise into a virtue because it is expedient! Let me alone!—it is all I ask. I go into society because you desire it; it is hard that you will persecute me on the one subject which is the most painful of all. Let me alone!—what I may suffer, I never intrude upon you. If you wish to be free from me—if I cost you anything you grudge—only allow me to work for myself—to go into the world, where for your sake I am not known, and, under another name, gain money for myself; I have often been told my voice would bring me more wealth than I should need. Only give me permission, I will never complain; but consent to be given over to Vallenstein, or any other man, I will not! To be sold by you to the highest bidder—to be forced into a union I should loathe—to be compelled to a marriage that would be infidelity to both! I know what you mean: an unwedded daughter is an ex-expense, and, as society counts, somewhat a discredit. If you feel it so, I am willing to support myself; if you allowed it, I should find no shame in that; but, once for all, I *swear*, that unless God will that I should ever marry him whom I love and honour, I will be no man's wife. If you care nothing for my peace, if you will not listen to my prayers, if you will not pity me in my trial—at least, you will not seek to make me break my oath!"

Jockey Jack rose from his seat, and left the room; he felt it was his duty to upbraid her for her folly; but he had not the heart to do it, and—true Briton!—left the room, ashamed of the emotion which showed that all good and generous things were not wholly dead within him.

At the ball at the English Embassy that night all beauty paled before hers; men looking on it would have given ten years of their lives to win one smile from those lovely eyes,

where the belle of Paris spent each day until two, denied to all, often in penning those letters, which were her lover's only solace through the long Crimean night.

Suddenly, however, she heard Rushbrooke Molyneux's voice in the outer room.

"Vy, am I a good shot?" he was saying.

"You know you are," answered his sister's voice; she was probably surprised at so irrelevant a question.

"Very well; then if you won't marry Vallenstein—the Dashers, you see, are coming home, and as soon as Colonel Sabretasche is in England I shall challenge him, he will meet me, and I shall shoot him here—just here, Vy—where life ceases instantaneously."

A low cry of horror burst from his sister's lips. Alma involuntarily rose and looked into the room; she saw that Violet had started from her brother's side, her face blanched with amazement, and her eyes fastened on him with the fascination and the loathing with which a bird gazes up into a snake's green fiery eyes.

"Great Heaven! you would do murder?"

"Murder! What an idea! Duelling is legitimate, in this country at least; and I dare say your lover will find his way to Paris, though he is such a 'man of honour.' Listen to me, Vy; seriously, you must be mad to be taking the veil, as it were, for a fellow who can't marry you—for the best of all reasons, that he is another woman's husband. It's the greatest tomfoolery one ever heard. Why shouldn't you do like any other girl—send this bosh of romance to the deuce and settle well? Any woman going would be wild to have a chance of winning Vallenstein. He's an out-and-out better match than we could have looked for; and he'll be very facile, Violet; he will be an easy husband after a little time, and you can invite Sabretasche to your Court—"

"God help me! if my brother tempt me to double dishonour!"

The words broke from her almost unconsciously. She deigned no answer to him, but stood looking at him with such loathing and contempt that Rushbrooke Molyneux, though he was far gone in shamelessness, shrank before it.

But like many such natures, coward at heart, he could ly a woman.

"Well, will you marry Prince Carl, or not?"

"I have told you once for all—*no.*"

Violet stood, her head just turned over her shoulder to him as she was about to leave the room; her calm, resolute, contemptuous tone stung him into irritation; and Rushbrooke had set his heart on his sister's becoming Vallenstein's wife, for certain pecuniary reasons of his own, having lost very heavily to the Prince at the French Derby, and over Baccarat.

"You are quite determined? Then I shoot Sabretasche dead four-and-twenty hours after I see him next. Come, Vy, choose: the wedding-ring for yourself, or the grave for your lover?"

He meant what he said—for the time at least; and Violet knew he was quite capable of doing all he said, and more, if he threatened it. Her love subdued her pride; in the frenzy of the moment she turned back and caught both her brother's hands:

"Rushbrooke! are you utterly merciless—utterly brutal? Not to save my own life would I kneel to you: but to save his I would stoop lower, were it possible! I know that he would choose murder from you, rather than infidelity from me. If you take his life, you take mine; my existence is bound with his—you will scarcely brand yourself a fratricide?"

"Splendid acting, Vy", said her brother coldly. "You always did act well, though; you played in the Belvoir theatricals when you were only ten, I remember. Come, think better of it; marry Vallenstein, and your idol is safe from me. If you boast your love is so great, you might surely save the man's life?"

"God help me?" moaned Violet.

"Will you marry Prince Carl?"

"No!"

"You will 'murder' Vivian Sabretasche then, as you term it?"

Another cry burst from Violet's lips, forced out as from a woman on the rack of the Star Chamber or the Inquisition. Then she lifted her eyes to him, with deep dark circles under them, her face full of unutterable anguish, but with a strange nobility upon it.

"I would rather leave him in God's hands than yours.

He will protect him from you! I have told you, I will never break my faith to him!"

"Very well! I will go and have a look at my pistols," smiled her brother, as he rose.

But Violet's courage gave way, she fell heavily forwards on a couch.

"My beloved! my beloved! God knows I would give my life for yours, but they shall never make me false to you! You would not wish it—you would not wish it, darling,—not to save your life—"

Alma could stay no longer; with one bound, like a young panther, she was in the room and kneeling beside Violet, while she turned her beaming, flashing eyes, full of their azure fire, upon Violet's brother.

"She gave you your right title. Fratricide! You are more than that, you are a brute, and were I of your own sex, I would make you feel it, boasted duellist, or rather murderer, though you be. What is your sister's marriage to you, that you should seek to force her into a union that she loathes? Prince Carl himself would cry shame on you. Go, go, and never come near your sister till you come to ask her pardon for your inhuman words and dastard act."

With all her old passion, Alma spoke, like a little Pythoness in her wrath; every one of her words brought a flush of shame to his cheek, and he forgot that it was his mother's dependent whom he should have cowed with a word and threatened with dismissal.

He left the room, murmuring something of Vallenstein, his friend—devotedly attached—Violet's unfortunate attachment—only meant to frighten her, of course—nothing more—nothing more. Then he backed out; and Violet lifted her face with a painful tremulousness on the lips

"Alma, I have not forgotten your definition of fidelity!"

The smile with which she spoke struck to her listener's heart; and she looked up at her with an answering regard, that seemed to Violet like an angel promise, and prophecy, for the future:

"To those who are thus faithful reward will come!"

Violet tried to smile again, but her lips quivered in the effort, and she rose and left the room; while Alma, seizing the paper that Rushbrooke had flung down, tore it apart

with breathless haste, remembering his words, "The Dashers are coming home."

De Vigne had been much altered since Curly's death. Curly's words had let in one ray of hope, and he cursed the headlong impetuosity which had made him send her letter back unopened. There was hope, and sometimes De Vigne strove with all his force to shut it out, lest it should break in and fool him once again; at others he clung to it as men do to the only chance that makes their life of value. Heaven knows that if his love for Alma had been error, it brought him punishment enough. Whichever way it turned, he saw enough to madden him. If she were false to him, his life would be one long and bitter curse; if he had judged her too harshly, and his neglect and cruelty had driven her to desperation, and sent her, young, unprotected, attractive as she was to men, into the chill world to battle with poverty, he shuddered to think what might have been her fate, so delicate, so trusting, so easily misunderstood; if she were true to him, across the heaven that opened to him with that hope, there stretched the dark memory of the woman who bore his name.

His love for her had changed as near to hate as his nature, generous and inherently forgiving, would allow. He had loved her, but with the love that slew Desdemona, that murdered Mariamne; a love that would have perilled all for one caress of hers, but would have sent her to her grave rather than have seen a rival's hand touch her, another's lips come near her; a love inexorable as death, that must have all, or nothing.

But in those long winter nights, tossing on his camp bed, Curly's words, like voices from the grave, recurred ceaselessly to him, and as a burst of tears—anguish in itself—yet relieves the still worse suffering of the brain, so gentler thoughts of Alma, a ray of hope, a gleam of trust, softened and relieved the bitter despair and hopeless agony of the past months. Was his own past so pure, his own life so perfect, that he had any right to cast a stone at her, even though her error and her perfidy had blasted all his peace? De Vigne remembered, with a pang, how Sabretasche had said to him, "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall," and how he had retorted, in the pride of his unassailed strength, that to win, a young girl's love, bound and fettered

as he was, would be a blackguard's act; yet his honour had gone down before his passion, and he had forgotten the ties that bound him, until, had she been true to him, it would have been useless to remember them.

If she had been false to him, if she had been Vane Castleton's toy for the hour and the plaything of others since, he would try to find her, save her, shield her from her fate, even though to find her, and to leave her so, broke his own heart. If she had been true to him, and others had wronged her youth and her guilelessness, he would drag her from their clutches; and no matter into what depths of misery she had sunk, he would raise her up, avenge her, and if ever his name became his own again, give it, with his love and honour, to her in the sight of men. Across the darker passions of his soul gleamed the Pity and the Pardon he had once had need to ask of her. His love grew gentler, nobler, tenderer; and he thought, amidst the anguish of those still night-watches, "Who am I, to sit in judgment on her or any other?"

De Vigne had at last learnt a lesson that he had never learned before in all his life—he had learnt to love not only *for himself*, but more purely, more holily, more unselfishly.

But at Constantinople—he whom all the army called by his Indian sobriquet of the Charmed Life, whom shot and shell, death and danger, had alike spared; who had ridden unharmed out of the fatal mêlée before the guns of Balaklava, though the last to leave those doomed and death-haunted lines;—at Constantinople De Vigne was chained on a sick-bed by the bitterest of all our Crimean foes—the cholera. It was touch and go with him; his life was very nearly added to those ghastly Returns, which witnessed how much human life was lost out there by mismanagement and procrastination. Thank God, the strength of his constitution pulled him through at last, but the Dashers sailed for England without him. I got leave to stay with him. I would have been cashiered rather than leave him alone in the Scutari sick-wards—in that pestilential place, which sounds so poetic and delicious with its long, lovely name, its Golden Horn, its glistening Bosphorus, its gleaming minarets, its Leilas, its Dudus, its bulbuls, and its beauty; but is, as all of us can witness, a very abomination for a

…n to dwell in, with its dirt, its fleas, its mosquitoes, …ering crowds chattering every lingo, its abominable …urks with their eternal "Bono Johnny," and its air with disease, malaria, and filth.

Sabretasche offered willingly to stay too.

"No, no; go to England, Sabretasche," said De Vigne, sig…ing the Colonel down towards him in one of his intervals of comparative ease. "Before long I hope to follow you, and you would do me much more service if you would—if you could—without bringing her name forward at all, learn something for me of—"

He stopped; he could not speak her name without a sharp spasm as of severe physical pain.

Sabretasche bent his head till his lips were close to De Vigne's ear; it was the first time he had heard him allude to her throughout the campaign.

"Of Alma Tressillian?" he said softly.

De Vigne signed him assent, and a silent pressure of his hand was bond enough between them. If Sabretasche had been like some eminent Christians of my acquaintance, he might have taken the occasion to exalt his own superior foresight in prophesying the trouble that would be born from De Vigne's careless intimacy with the Little Tressillian; being nothing more than a "bon camarade," with a generous mind, a kind heart, and a gentleman's tact, he felt no temptation to do anything of the kind.

Some three weeks after Ours had got under weigh for England, I was sitting by De Vigne's couch reading to him from some of the periodicals my mother had sent me. It was Hamley of the Artillery's "Lady Lee," which ought to interest anybody if a novel ever can; but I doubt if De Vigne heard a word of it. He lay in one position; his head turned away from me, his eyes fixed on the light rosy eastern clouds, his right hand clenched hard upon the bedclothes as though it would lift him perforce from that cruel inaction, as it had aided him so many times in life. I was glad that at that minute an old Indian comrade of his—come en route from Calcutta to England viâ Constantinople to have a look at the seat of war—was shown into his room; hoping that courtesy might rouse him more than Hamley's lively story had power to do.

The man was a major in the Cavalry (Queen's—ça va

sans dire), of the name of De Vine—a resemblance near enough, I dare say, to justify Mrs. Malaprop and Co. in thinking them brothers, and the Heralds' Office in making them out two branches of the same house.

He sat and chatted some time of their old Scinde reminiscences; heartily sorry to see De Vigne knocked down as he was, and congratulating him warmly on the honours he had won—honours for which in truth, though De Vigne cared very little, as long as he had had the delight of fighting well, and was thought to "have done his duty."

At last the man rose to go, and had bidden us good-bye, when he turned back:

"I say, old fellow, I've forgotten the chief thing I came here to tell you. This letter of yours has been voyaging after me, sent from Calcutta to Delhi, and from Delhi to Rohilcunde, and God knows where, till it came to my hand about four months ago. I was just going to open it when I saw the *g* in the name, and the "Crimea" which the donkeys at the Post-office overlooked. You see your correspondent has put you Hussars; I suppose that led to the mistake. It's a lady's writing: I hope the delay's been no damage to your fair friend, whoever she be. I dare say you have 'em by scores from a dozen different quarters, so this one has been no loss. By George! it's seven o'clock, and I'm to dine at the embassy. Good night, old fellow; I shall come and see you to-morrow."

Scrawled over with the different postscripts and addresses, so that nothing of the original address was visible save the "Major De Vigne," Alma's writing was recognised by him ere it had left the other's hand; almost before the door had closed he wrenched it open, and turning away from me, read the many close-written and tear-blotted pages that she had penned to him on her sick-bed at Montressor's. Knowing he would wish to read on unwitnessed, I left the room.

He did read on, and, when he had read all, bowing his head upon his hands, he wept like a woman. For in that hour of joy just won, for which his heart went up to God in trembling gratitude—between him, and the love that was his heritage and right as man, there stood the dark shadow, the relentless phantom of his Marriage. It is bitter, Heaven knows, to be alone in the Shadow of Death,

with no ray of light to guide, no gleam of hope to aid us; but even more bitter than this is it to stand as he now stood, with the sudden gleam and radiance of a sunshine that he must never enjoy playing even at his very feet;—to stand as he now stood, fettered by irons that long ago his own hands had forged; held back by the Eumenides of his own headlong follies; divided from all he loved as by a great gulf, by the fell consequences of the Past; his own passions their own Nemesis.

Would you know the poison that stung him in the cup of his joy? It was this single passage: "She told me she was your wife, Granville!—*your wife!*—that coarse, loud-voiced, cruel-eyed woman! But that at the moment I hated her so bitterly for her assumption, I could have laughed in her face! I could not help telling her it was a pity she did not learn the semblance of a lady to support her in her rôle; for I hated her so much for daring, even in pretence, to take your name—to venture to claim *you*. If it was wrong, I could not help it: I love you so dearly that I could never bear even an imaginary rival. That woman your wife! Not even when she showed me some paper or other she said was a marriage certificate, did a thought of belief in her story—which would have been disbelief in you—cross my mind for a moment; and when I discovered Vane Castleton's cruel plot, and saw so plainly how this woman must have been an emissary of his to try and wean me from you, I thanked God that I had never been disloyal to you even with a thought. I trusted you too well ever to believe that you would have kept such a secret from me. I loved you too fondly to wrong you in your absence by want of that faith which it is your right to expect and mine to give!"

Those were the words that struck him more fiercely than any dagger's thrust. This was the wound which that soft and childlike hand, that would have been itself cut off rather than have harmed him, gave him in the very words that vowed her love. This is what chained him, Tantalus-like, from the heaven long yearned for now so near, but near only to mock his fetters, to elude his grasp.

He must stand before her and say, "Your faith was misplaced—that woman is my wife!"

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE WIFE TO WHOM SABRETASCHE WAS BOUND

THE first chesnut-leaves of the Tuileries were silvered in the moonlight, and the dark Seine wound under the gloomy bridges of the old town out under the wooded heights of St. Germain, where the oaks that had listened to the love of Louise de la Vallière were thrusting out their earliest spring-buds. It was night and the deep calm heavens bent above, as if in tenderness for the fair white City that lay in the valley of the Seine, like one of the gleaming lilies of its own exiled Bourbons. Around it, in the grand old chase of St. Cloud, in the forest aisles of Fontainebleau, among the silent terraces of Versailles and Neuilly, the night was calm, still, hushed to holy silence; whilst in the City of pleasures, of blood, of mirth, of death, of wit, of strife, in the City of Mirabeau and André Chénier, of Rivarol and St. Just, of Marie Antoinette and Théroigne de Méricourt, the night was full of jests and laughter, as the gas-flowers of Mabille were lit, and the Imperial household thronged the palace of the Bourbons, and the crowds filled the Boulevards and the Cafés Chantants; the Chaumière and the Château des Fleurs, for Paris was awake, crowned with flowers, with laughter on her lips and sparkling in her eyes, gay as a young girl at her first ball—gay as she has ever been, even on the eve of her darkest tragedies, her most terrible hours.

The soft spring night came down on Paris. Before the cheval-glass in her luxurious bedchamber, with jewels on her hair and in her bosom, stood the belle of its most aristocratic réunions, shuddering, even while her maid clasped the pearls upon her arm for a ball at Madame de la Vieillecour's, at the memory of those words from her brother's lips, which bade her choose between infidelity or death. At the window of her own room, looking up to the clear stars that seemed to rebuke from their calm and holy stillness, the gay and feverish fret of the human life below, Alma Tressillian gazed on the spring night, her eyes brilliant with the radiance of hope; he was coming home—her lover, her idol; what could await her now but a return of that joy

once so rudely shivered from her grasp? Not very many yards off, in her crowded and bizarre boudoir, where finery stood in the stead of taste, and overloading passed for luxury, the Trefusis read the line in the English papers which announced the arrival of her husband's troop, and threw it aside with an oath because the Crimea had not rid her of his life, and left her mistress of a portion of his wealth that would have come to her—for the law would have recognised her rights as his "wife," and she was in difficulties and in debt. Underneath the windows that shone bright with the wax-lights of Violet's toilette-table, stood a woman, once as beautiful as she, but now haggard, tawdry, pitiful to look upon, begging of the passers-by for the coins which would procure her a draught of absinthe; that deadly tempter, that sure, slow, relentless murderer who, Jael-like, soothes us for the moment to drive the iron nail into our brain while we slumber, and whom, madman-like, we seek and crave the thirst for, though we know the end is death. Those four women—how unlike they were! Dissimilar as night and dawn; as fragrant roses and dank nightshade; as the two spirits that in fable and apologue hover over our path, the one to lead us to a Gehenna, the other to an Eden; dissimilar enough, God knows. Yet the same stars looked down on them, the same men had loved them, and, in one chain of circumstances, Fate had bound and woven them together.

That same night Sabretasche arrived in Paris. Rumours had reached him of Violet's betrothal to the German Prince. Believe them for an instant he did not. But the rumour of her projected union struck him with a deadly chill; he realised for the first time the possibility that, one day, if he could not claim her, another might. He remembered women who had loved, perhaps, as fondly as she, who had gone to their husbands' arms with hearts aching for another; and despite his faith, trembled for the treasure of which another man might rob him any moment, and he have no right or power to avenge the theft!

He went to Paris as soon as his men were landed to learn what truth or untruth there was in this report; to look—if unseen himself—once more upon her, before another's right should claim the beauty once promised as his own.

It was midnight when he drove to where her people lived in the Champ' Elysées.

A carriage stood before the entrance, the door was wide open, the hall was bright with its wax-lights, the servants were moving to and fro, and in the full glare of the light he beheld that face, which with the din of war and death around had never for an hour ceased to haunt him. She stood there, unconscious of the eyes whose gaze she had often thought would have power to recall her from the tomb; a narrow band of gold and pearls clasped her wavy chesnut hair; her large eyes were darker and more brilliant still from the shadow beneath their lids; about her were all the grace and fascination of her surpassing loveliness; and as he looked on her, she crossed the pavement and entered the carriage, still unconscious that in the darkness of the night the heart she held so dear was beating close to hers!

The carriage rolled down the Champs Elysées. Ere the door closed, Sabretasche went up to a servant and asked whither they went.

The man told him to the Duchesse de La Vieillecour's masked ball.

Sabretasche remembered that on alighting in Paris that night he had met Léonce de La Vieillecour's, the Duc's son by an early marriage, who had bidden him come and see his handsome stepmother at her bal masqué that night, to which the Colonel had given a hasty negative. Now he drove to his rooms, took a domino and a mask, and joined one of the most brilliant and amusing réunions of the season —a *bal de l'opéra* where all the revellers had pure descents and stately escutcheons, though not, perhaps, much more stainless reputations than the fair maskers of more "equivocal position," who were treading the boards, and drinking the champagne, of the opera festivities.

He moved through the rooms, threading his way through those brilliant butterflies who toil so wearily on the treadmill of fashion. As yet he saw not the one he sought; though now and then he heard from men as they passed by him praises of her beauty, praises which turned his blood to fire. Once, a violet domino powdered with violets in gold passed him quickly; jealousy quickened his senses, and, despite the mask, he recognised Carl of Vallenstein, with whom in days gone by he had drunk Johannisberg, and played écarté, and smoked Havannahs under the linden-trees of his summer palace in Saxony.

He lost the Prince in the crowd; and still nowhere could he find her whom his eyes ached with longing to gaze upon again, and Léonce de la Vieillecour dragged him perforce to see the Duchess, to speak to Madame of the Crimea and of Curly.

Gwen Brandling and Madame de La Vieillecour must truly have been two different beings, that she could talk with scarce a tremor of that terrible death-scene in the hospital of St. Paul—talk of it flirting her fan, and glancing through her mask with those magnificent eyes, while the dance-music rang out in her ears! Did she really think so little of her brother, of the fair child with his golden curls and his gleeful laugh, who had played with her under the shadow of the lime-trees in their old home, long years before, when the world and its prizes were no more to her than the polished chesnuts lying at her feet, and no prophetic shadow foretold to him his dying hour in the horrors of Sebastopol? Did she really think no more of him, as she waltzed in that brilliant circle with the arms of a royal Prince around her? God knows! I will not judge her. Because there are no tears seen in our eyes, it does not follow we are dead to grief.

The windows of the ball-room opened at the far-end, on to a terrace overlooking the cool shadowy gardens of the hotel; and dropping the curtain of one of the windows behind him, Sabretasche escaping from the Duchess, stood a moment in the calm air. At the end of the terrace, having evidently quitted the ball-room as he had done by one of the twelve windows that opened on the terrace, stood a woman and a man. It was Violet; and beside her, bending towards her, the domino of Carl of Vallenstein, his mask in his hand, and on his impassive features an eagerness and a glow but very rarely wakened there.

Not for his life could Sabretasche have stirred a step from where he stood; fascinated, basilisk-like, he gazed upon the woman he loved, and the man, whom the world said was soon to win from her the title by which, but two years before, he had hoped to have called her. He stood and gazed upon them, upon the one, whom he would have cherished so fondly; and upon the spoiler who might have stolen from him all he valued upon earth. They were

speaking in French, and some of their words came to him where he stood.

"That is your last resolve?"

"Yes, I am not ungrateful for the honour you would do me; but to accept it would be a crime in me and a treason to you. I know—I grieve to know—that others may have misled you, and not replied to you at the first as I bid them, and I sought this opportunity to tell you frankly, and once for all, that I can never be your wife."

"Because you love another!"

"If I do, monseigneur, such knowledge should surely have prevented your seeking me as you have now done. I should have thought you too proud to wish for an unwilling bride."

"But I love you so tenderly, mademoiselle; I would win you at every risk, and if you give me your hand, I will do my best to make your heart mine too—"

"It is impossible! Do not urge me further. Leave me, I beg of you. I shall never marry. I should have hoped my friends had made you understand this; but since they misled you, there was but one open and honourable course for me to pursue—to tell you at once, myself, that I can never be your wife, nor any other's. Your words only pain me. Leave me, I entreat of you."

He was too true a gentleman to press her further; he bowed low, and left her.

He lifted the curtain of one of the windows, and went back into the brilliantly-lighted ball-room; and Sabretasche was at last alone with the woman he loved.

With yearning love he stretched out his arms, murmuring her name—that name which had been on his lips in so many dreams, broken by the din of hostile cannon. She turned, and, with a low faint cry, sprang forward, and fell upon his heart.

For awhile in the joy of re-union, they forgot all save that they were together—save that he held her, with that heart beating against his which no man as yet had had power to win from him—save that he had come back to her from danger and suffering, out of the very shadow of the valley of death, from under the very stroke of the angel of destruction.

On such a meeting we will not dwell; there is little such

joy on earth, and what there is, is sacred. As, after a dream of the night in which those we have lost live again, and the days long gone by bloom once more for us with all their sunshine and their fragrance, we awake in the grey dawn of the winter's morning, with all the sorrow and the burden, the darkness and the weariness, of our actual life rushing back upon us; so they awoke to the memory that they had met only to part again—that they had had an interval of rest, given them only like the accused in the torture-room, even that they might live to suffer the more.

They were forced to part! If it be hard to part a living member from a quivering human body, is it not harder to sever from each other two human hearts such as nature formed to beat as one, and which are only torn asunder, at the cost of every quivering nerve, and every clinging fibre? Heaven knows, few enough hearts in this world beat in unison for those that do, to need be parted! And as the memory of their inexorable fate rose up before him, Sabretasche shuddered at the sight of that exquisite loveliness, condemned for his sake to a solitary and unblessed life, desolate as a widow, without even the title and the memories of a wife. Involuntarily he drew her closer to him—involuntarily he murmured:

"Oh, my God! we cannot live thus!"

What comfort had she to give him? None. She could only weep, clinging to him and vowing she would be true to him always—true to him whatever chanced.

"'True to me!' And I have nothing to give you in return but suffering—I have nothing to reward you with but anguish and trial! If I could but bear your burden with mine! If I could but suffer alone—"

"No, no," she murmured vaguely, "not alone—not alone. What we suffer, let us suffer *together*. You would not have me cease to love you?"

"My God! no. And yet if I were not selfish, I should bid you forget me, and try to rejoice, if you obeyed. Violet, if ever you should"—and, despite all his effort, his voice was all but inaudible with the anguish and the tenderness he tried to hold down and rein in—"if you should think at any time it were possible to find happiness with another—if you fancy you could in other loves forget my fatal

passion, which has been only doomed to crowd your years with suffering—*be* happy; I will never reproach you. Do not think of what *I* shall suffer; no complaint of mine shall ever trouble you. I will try and thank God that he has not, through me, cursed the life dearer than my own, and in time, perhaps, I may learn to bless the one who has given you the joy I would have—"

He ceased; his voice was low and broken; he could not complete his generous speech; the great love in him overpowered every other feeling; he could not bid her go to another! Who amongst us would ask of any man to sign his own death-warrant? Who can wonder that he shrank from consigning himself to a living death, to an existence hopeless as the grave, with throes of mortal agony that would never cease as long as there were blood in his veins, and vitality in his heart?

She looked up in his face, the moonlight gleaming in her eyes, in which was the smile of love without hope, yet faithful to the end—such a smile as a woman might give from the scaffold to one whom she would fain comfort to the last.

"Do you remember I said I was yours—yours for life and death—yours for ever? That vow is as sacred to me as though it were my marriage oath to you. Love, happiness, home—and with another? You can know me little, my own dearest, to speak so to me! Others have tried to urge me to infidelity. I never thought *you* would insult me too. Noble, generous, unselfish as your love is, *I*, who thought once to be your wife—I will be worthy of it, and I count sorrow from your hand far dearer than joy from any other's!"

He could not answer her; he tried to thank her, but his voice failed him. To have such love as this given him, and to be forced by fate to live as though he had it not!—to leave her as though she were nothing to him, when, only grown dearer by absence, to part from her was to wrench away his very life!

His burden grew heavier than he could bear. With her words dawned the ideal of so fair a life! It rose up before his grasp with all its sweetest glories. The world—the world—what was that to them? he had but to stretch out his hand, and say to the woman who oved him, "Come!"

He became deathly pale; his head was drooped till his lips rested on hers; he stood immovable, save for the fast thick throbs of his heart, and the convulsive strength with which he pressed her against his breast. The physicial conflicts he had of late passed through were peace, rest, child's play, compared with this deadly struggle that waited for him in the first hour of his return!

Suddenly he lifted his head.

"I have no strength for this! Let us go into the world. I must put some shield between us and this torture."

He spoke rapidly, almost harshly; it was the first time that his voice had ever lost its softness, his manner the tenderness natural to him at all times, and doubly gentle ever to her. She gave one heavy, hopeless sigh, and as he heard it he shivered from head to foot. He dared no longer be with her alone, and he led her back into the crowded ball-room.

There were many masks worn that night, at that bal masqué of the Duchesse de La Vieillecour's!

Escaping from the crowd he walked along under the calm April skies, careless of the groups that jostled him on the trottoir, from the gay students, chanting their *chansons à boire*, to the piteous outcasts whose last home would be the Morgue; from the light-hearted, bright-eyed grisette of the Quartier Latin, to the wretched chiffonnier of the Faubourg d'Enfer, stopping to carry rags and filth away as wealth. He walked along, wandering far, across the Pont Neuf, and into the old City, unconscious where he went, blind to the holy beauty of the midnight stars, deaf to the noisy laughter of the midnight revellers, till a shrill voice struck on his ear, the voice of a woman, "*Limosina per la carità, signor!*"

The language of his childhood and his youth always stirred a chord of tenderness and of regret in his heart. For his fondest endearments Italian words rose to his lips, and in his hours of strongest passion, Italian was the language in which he would first and most naturally have spoken. Despite the chain that Italy had hung upon him, he loved her, and he loved her language, with one of the deep and mournful attachments with which we love what has cost us heavily, and which is yet dear to us. From his musings, that shrill voice, with its "*Carità, carità, signor!*"

startled him with a sudden shock. Perhaps something in the tones stung him with a vague pang of remembrance, a pang as of an old wound suddenly struck in the dark by an unseen hand. At any rate, involuntarily, for the sake of the Italian words, he stretched out his hand with the alms she begged.

The face was haggard, faded, stamped with the violence of a fiendish temper, inflamed with the passion for drink; the eyes red, the lips thin, the brow contracted, the hair grey and spare—the face of a virago, the face of a drunkard. Still, with an electric thrill of memory, it took him back to another face, twenty years younger, with delicate colouring, smooth brow, long shining hair, and dark voluptuous eyes—another, yet the same, marked and ruined even then with the stain of the same virago passions.

He gazed upon her, that dim and horrible memory struggling into birth by the light of the gas-lamp; her bloodshot eyes looked up at him; and *thus*, after twenty years, he and his faithless wife met once again in life.

He gazed upon her as men in ancient days gazed on the horrible visage of the Medusa, fascinated with a spell which, while they loathed it, held them tight bound there, to look till their eyes grew dim and their hearts sick unto death on what they dreaded and abhorred; fascinated, he gazed upon her, the woman who had betrayed him; fascinated, she gazed on him, the husband she had wronged. They recognised each other; the tie that had once bound them, the wrong that had once parted them, would have taught them to know each other, though twice twenty years had parted them; he who had wedded and loved her, she who had wedded and dishonoured him.

There they stood, in the midnight streets of Paris, face to face once more. *They*, husband and wife? *They*, those whom "God had joined together?" Oh! farce and folly and falsehood!

There they stood. The man, with his noble bearing, his delicate beauty, his generous and chivalric nature, his highly-cultured intellect, his fastidious tastes, his proud susceptibilities, sensitive to dishonour, incapable of a base thought or a mean act. And *she*—the beauty she had once owned distorted with the vile temper and ravings of a shrew; on face and form the stamp of a virago's passions,

of a conscience dead, of a brain besotted with the drink to which she had latterly flown as consoler and companion; a creature from whom a passer-by would shrink with loathing; the type of lowest, most debased, most loathsome womanhood!

*Yet* these were husband and wife!

She looked up in his face—up into those melancholy and lustrous eyes, which seemed to her the eyes of an avenging angel.

All his wrongs, all the memories of that betrayal which had stung and eaten into his very soul—all the torture which his tie to this woman had brought on his head and on hers who was dearer than his life—all the joys of which this wife, so false to him, had robbed him—all the horror, the bitterness, the misery of his bondage to this woman—all rushed upon him at the sight of the wife to whom fate condemned him. His face grew stern, with bitterness rare with him. Wronged pride, outraged trust, violated honour, loathing, scorn, pity, an unspoken accusation, which was more full of reproach and rebuke than any words, were written on his face as, sick unto death, he turned involuntarily from her—deeply as she had erred to him, she was sunk too low for him to upbraid. With a shudder he turned from her; and at that instant with an inarticulate cry she fell down on the flagstones of the street. Confused, and but half-conscious from the draught with which she had drugged her thoughts and satisfied the passion which had grown upon her, as the passion for drink grows ever on its victims; strongly imbued with the superstition of her country; while vague stray remnants of the miracles, the credulities, and the legends of her religion still dwelt in her mind too deep for any crime to uproot her belief in them;—the pale stern face of her husband, with the dark, melancholy, reproachful eyes that gazed upon her with a voiceless rebuke which touched her into remorse for the lengthened wrong her life had done him, seemed, as he stood suddenly before her in the faint cold light of the moon, as the face of an Avenging Angel beckoning her to the chastisement of her crimes. Debilitated and semi-delirious, her strength eaten and burnt away by the deadly absinthe, her mind hazy and clouded, impressionable to the superstitions of her creed and country; struck with terror at what her weak mind

fancied was a messenger of retribution from the heaven she alternately reviled, blasphemed, and dreaded; with a shrill cry of horror and appeal, she fell down at his feet, a helpless, motionless mass, lying still, death-like, huddled together in the cold, clear moonlight, on the glistening pavement, before the man her life had wronged.

His impulse was to leave her there; to fly for ever from the spectacle of the woman he had once loved fondly, and who had once slept innocently on his heart, thus lost and thus degraded; to leave for ever the presence of a wife who outraged every sense, every taste, every feeling, but to whom the law still bound him, because from a drunkard no divorce is granted!

But pity, duty, humanity stayed him. Though she was his enemy, she was a woman; though she had wronged him, she was now in want; though she had forsaken, betrayed, and robbed him of more than twenty long years' peace and joy, she had *once* had his love. He had once vowed to cherish and protect her, and, though she had long ago lost all right or power to appeal to those vows, or that care, he would not leave her there, alone in the Paris streets at midnight, lying in the kennel like a dog.

A crowd had gathered round them in an instant—round the man with his patrician grace and beauty, and the woman lying at his feet, squalid and repulsive, all the more loathsome for the shadow of past loveliness that remained, showing all that nature would have left so fair, but for the vile human passions that had ruined and destroyed it. Among the crowd was a young medical student from the Quartier Latin, on his way from the Morgue, who stooped down to look at her as she lay.

A dark crimson stream was welling from her lips out on to the pavement, white and glistening in the moonlight. With a sickening shudder her husband turned away. He had seen the horrors of war; he had looked on suffering and bloodshed with that calmness and tranquillity of nerve which soldiers learn perforce; but a sudden faintness seized him at the sight of that life stream which, perchance, bore with it the last throbs of an existence which was the curse of his own. The street faded from his view, the voices of men grew confused in his ear, the grey moonlight seemed to whirl round and round him in a dizzy haze, out of which

glared and laughed in mocking horror the face of a fiend—the face of his Wife. His brain lost all consciousness; life seemed slipping from his grasp; he saw nothing, he heard nothing, he was conscious of nothing, save that horrible loathsome face close to his, with its wild bloodshot eyes dragged him with her down, down, down—away from life—into a vague hell of horror.

The night wind fanning his brow awoke him from his swoon; the voices around him seemed to bring with them a glad rush of free, healthful, welcome life; the delirium of his brain faded away in the clear light of the moon. The medical student answered the glance with which Sabretasche asked the question his lips refused to put into words.

"They have taken that poor woman, monsieur, to the Café Euphrosyne to see what is the matter with her before she goes to the hospital. My friend Lafitolle, a surgeon like myself, is with her."

Sabretasche longed to leave the place, to go where he could run no risk of hearing, seeing, coming again in contact with the terrible phantom of the night—the phantom that was no spirit-form moulded by the fancies of his brain to be dissolved in the clear and sunny light of morning, but a dark and hopeless reality from which there was no awakening. But he knew by her beggar's prayer that she must be in want, and his heart was too generous, too gentle, too full of knightly and chivalric feeling, to leave her without aid to suffer, perhaps to die, homeless and destitute, in the hospital of a foreign city.

The Café Euphrosyne was a low and not overcleanly house in the by-street into which Sabretasche unconsciously had wandered; it was chiefly frequented by the small shopkeepers of the quartier; but the people of the house were good-hearted, good-natured, cheerful people—a man and his wife, with whom the world went very well in their own small part of it, and who, unlike the generality of people with whom the world goes well, were very ready and willing to aid, if they could, and with whom it went ill. Their café was open and lighted; merry suppers of students and workpeople were going on in one portion of it, and in another the good mistress of the house was venting pitiful exclamations and voluble compassion on the poor woman whom a water-carrier had lifted on his broad shoulders and borne into her house.

There lay the once beautiful Tuscan, surrounded by a crowd—the many curious, the few compassionate—the life-blood still dropping slowly from between her thin ashy lips, her blood-shot eyes closed, her haggard cheeks more hollow still from their leaden hue, the hair that he remembered so golden and luxuriant now thin and spare, and streaked with grey, far more so than her years warranted. As Sabretasche drew near the door of the chamber a murmur ran among the people that the English milord knew something of her, and on the strength of it the surgeon came forward to Sabretasche.

"Pardon, monsieur, but may I ask if you know anything of this poor woman, of her family, of where she comes from? If not, she shall go to the hospital!"

The flush of pain and of pride that passed over Sabretasche's face, and then passed away, leaving it pallid as any statuary, did not escape the young student's quick eyes.

"No," he answered quickly. "Do not send her to the hospital. Let her remain here! I will defray the expenses."

He took out his purse as he spoke, and at sight of the glittering gold within it, and the sum he tendered her out of it, Madame Riolette, though as little mercenary as a woman can be who lives by the money she makes, thought what an admirable thing it is to fall in by fate with an English milord; and immediately acquiesced in his wish for her to receive the stranger, and listened with the humblest respect while he bade her do all that was necessary.

He waited there, leaning against the door of the café, the night wind blowing on his fevered forehead, a thousand conflicting thoughts and feelings at war within him, till an older surgeon who had been brought thither came down the stairs. As he passed him, Sabretasche arrested him.

"Is she—will she—"

He paused! not to save his life could he have framed the question to ask if hers were in jeopardy; hers, dark with the wrong of twenty years to him; hers, so long the curse upon his own; hers, the sole bar between himself and happiness.

"Will she live?" guessed the surgeon. "No, not likely. She has poisoned herself with absinthe, poor wretch. I

suppose you found her on the pavement, monsieur? It is very generous to assist her so liberally. Shocking thing that absinthe—shocking! Bon soir, monsieur."

The surgeon, without awaiting a reply to any of his questions, went off, impatient to return to the écarté he had left to attend his summons to the Café Euphrosyne, and Sabretasche still leaned against the door-post in the clear starlight, while the fresh rush of the night wind, and the noisy revelry from suppers, alike passed by him unheeded.

His heart throbbed, his pulse beat rapid time, his brain whirled with the tide of emotions that rushed through him For more than twenty years he had not seen his wife; he had left her a young and beautiful woman, with the rounded form, the delicate outline, the luxuriant hair, the rich colouring of youth. As such he had always thought of her.

For more than a score of years his eyes had not rested on her, and the change which time had wrought, and temper and drink hastened, shocked him as a young child, laughing at its own gay, fair face in a mirror, would start, if in its stead he saw the worn and withered features he should wear in his old age.

This sudden resurrection of the memories of his youth, this sudden meeting with the wife so long unseen; this abrupt transition from the delicate, fresh, and exquisite loveliness of Violet Molyneux, to the worn, haggard, repulsive form of the woman who barred him from her; all these took a strange hold upon him, and struck him with a strange shock; such as I have felt coming out of the warm, bright, voluptuous sunshine of a summer's day into the silent, damp, midnight gloom of a cavern. And side by side with this face, seen in the glare of the gaslight, with that harsh voice and shrill cry for alms, and those wild, blood-shot eyes lifted to his, rose the memory of the one so young, so fair, with its soft lips white with pain, and the clinging clasp of the fond hands, and the quiver in the low and tender voice, "I count sorrow from your hand dearer than joy from any other." Side by side they rose before him; and with such delirium as they might know who, on the scaffold, putting up their last prayer to God, and taking their last look of the golden sunlight and the laughing earth, saw the pardon which beckoned them

to life among their fellow-men from the very border of their grave, there came rushing through his heart and brain the thought of *freedom*—the freedom that would come with Death! To banish it he would have needed to be deity, not man.

He leaned there against the door, his thoughts mingling in strange chaos, death and life; at once going back to the buried past of his youth and on to the possible future of his manhood. The students brushing past him with their light French jests, going homewards after their merry supper, roused him to the actual moment; and ere the house closed for the night he turned and sought Madame Riolette, to bid her have all that might be necessary for the comfort and the care of her charge, and wait for no solace that money could bring, to soothe the dreary passage to the grave, of the woman whose life had blasted his.

She listened to his injunctions with the reverence which gleaming gold coins are sure to gain for their owner all the world over, and promised to give the sufferer every care and comfort—a promise she would have kept without any bribe, for she was full of the ready and vivacious kindness of her country.

"Monsieur would not like to speak to the poor woman?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"No—no," said Sabretasche, hastily, with that flush of pain which every thought of his wife brought with it.

"But, monsieur," went on Madame Riolette, submissively, her little head, with its white cap, and its ponderous earrings, hung bashfully down, afraid of seeming rude to this English milord, "if monsieur could speak Italian it would be such a kindness to the poor woman. No one in the house could, and since she had become conscious, she kept murmuring Italian words, and seemed so wretched no one could understand them. As monsieur had been already so nobly benevolent to her, if monsieur would not mind adding so greatly to his goodness—"

And Madame Riolette paused, awed to silence by the pallor and the sternness on his face. She thought he was angry with her for her audacity, and began a trembling apology. Poor woman! his thoughts were far enough away from *her*. A struggle rose within him; he had an unconquerable loathing and shrinking, from ever looking

again upon the face of the woman who had wronged him; yet a strange mournful sort of pity awoke in him as he heard of her muttering words in their mutual language in foreign ears upon her death-bed, and he thought of her young, lovely, as he had first seen her among the pale-green olive-groves of Montepulto.

He stood still some moments, his face turned from the inquisitorial light of Madame Riolette's hand-lamp; then he lifted his head:

"Lead the way."

She led the way up a narrow staircase and along a little corridor, and opened for him a door through which he had to bend his head to pass, and ushered him into a chamber; small, it is true, but with all the prettiness and comfort she had been able to gather into it, and neither close nor hot, but full of the sweet evening air that had come in; blowing far from the olive-groves of the sufferer's native Tuscany, across the purple Alps and the blue mountains of Auvergne, over the deep woods, and stretching meadows, and rushing rivers of the interior, till it came fresh and fragrant, laden with the life and perfume, bearing healing on its wings to the heated, feverish, crowded streets of Paris.

Sabretasche took the lamp from the woman's hand, and signed her to retire, a hint which Madame Riolette interpreted by seating herself by the little table in the window and taking out her knitting, pondering, acute Parisienne that she was, on what possible connexion there could be between the poor, haggard, wretched-looking woman on her bed, and the graceful, aristocratic milord Anglais.

By the light of the lamp in his hand, Sabretasche stood and gazed upon his wife, as she lay unconscious of his gaze, with her eyes closed, and scarcely a pulsation to be seen that could mark life from death. He looked upon her face, with the stamp of vicious and virago passion on every line, on the nervous hand that had been raised in their last parting against his life; the hand which bore on its finger the key that had locked the fetters of marriage round and about with such pitiless force, the badge of a life-long bondage, the seal that stamped the death-warrant of his liberty and peace!—the wedding-ring that in the joyous glow, and blindfold trust of youth he had placed there, his

heart beating high, with all a lover's tenderest thoughts, the sign as he then believed of life-long joy and union with a woman who loved him as well and as truly as he loved her! He thought of his bride as she had looked to him on his marriage morning in Tuscany, fair as woman could ever need to be, with the orange-flowers and myrtles gathered with the dews of dawn glittering upon them, wreathed among her rich and golden hair; he looked upon her now, with the work of twenty years stamped upon her face, twenty years of wrong, of evil, of debasing thought, of avaricious passions, in which she had lived on the money of the husband she had wronged, to spend it in the lowest of all vices, drink. He knew nothing of how these twenty years had been passed, but he could divine nearly enough, seeing the wreck and ruin they had wrought. And he was tied to this woman!—if she rose from that bed of sickness, he was bound to her by law! His heart recoiled with horror, and sickened at the thought; reason, sense, nature, revolted, outraged and indignant at the hideous bondage. He longed to call the world that condemned him to such, around him where he stood, and ask them how they dare to fetter him to such a wife, to such a tie; chaining him to more horrible companionship than those inflict who chain the living body to the festering corpse, never to be unloosed till welcome death release the prisoner, consigned to such horror unspeakable by his own kind, by his own fellow-men!

As he gazed upon her, the light of the lamp falling on her eyes aroused her from the semi-conscious trance into which she had fallen, weakened by the loss of blood, which, though not great, had taken away the little strength and power which she had, all vitality and health having been eaten gradually up by the poison she had loved and courted —poison slow, but ever sure.

Her eyes unclosed and fastened on him with a wild, vacant stare; then she covered her face with her hands, and cowered down among the bed-cloths in mortal terror, muttering trembling and disjointed words;

"Oh, Santa Maria! have mercy, have mercy! I have erred, I have sinned, I confess it! Send him away, send him away; he will kill me with his calm, sad eyes, they pierce into my soul! I was mad—I hated him—I knew

not what I did. Oh, Mother of God, call him away! I am ready, I will come to the lowest hell if you will, so that I may not see him. His eyes, his eyes.—Holy Jesus, call him away!"

Her voice rose in a faint, shrill shriek, the phantasma of her brain was torture to her. She cowered down among the clothes, trembling and terror-stricken, before the gaze of the man she had betrayed, who, to her wandering brain, seemed like an avenging angel sent to carry her to an eternal abode among the damned.

"Poor soul, poor soul!" murmured Madame Riolette to her knitting-needles, "that's how she's been going on for the last hour. I wish the milord Anglais would let me send for the Père Lavoisier. If anybody can give rest to a weary sinner it is he."

Sick at heart with the scene, and filled with a mournful pity for the wreck he saw before him, Sabretasche tried to calm her with some Italian words of reassurance and compassion; but the sound of her native language seemed only to excite her more wildly still. She glared at him; her dark eyes, bloodshot and opened wide, recalling to him their last parting, when they had glittered upon him with the fire of a tigress, and the hatred of a murderess. She sprang up with a convulsive movement and signed him frantically from her.

"Go away, go away! I know you; you are my husband; you are come from hell to fetch me. I have sinned against you, and I would sin again. I hate you—I *hate* you! Go to your northern love! but you can never marry her—you can never marry her. *I* am your wife. All the world will tell you so, and I will not let you kill me. I will live—I will live, to curse you as I have—"

She sank back on her pillows, her little strength exhausted with the violence of her passions; her eyes still glaring, but half consciously, on him—quivering, panting, foaming at the mouth like a wild animal after a combat—there was little of humanity, nothing of womanhood, left in her—and this woman was his *wife*.

She lay on the bed, her wild eyes fixed on him, breathing loudly and quickly, defiant, though powerless, like a wounded tigress, stricken down in her strength, but with the fell ferocious instinct still alive within her. Then she

began again to shrink, and tremble, and cower before her own thoughts; and hiding her face in her hands, began to weep, murmuring some Latin words of the Church prayers, and calling on the Virgin's aid.

"I have sinned—I have sinned; oh, Madre di Dio, save me, *Fili Redemptor mundi Deus, miserere nobis.* What are the words—what are the words; will no one say them? I used to know them so well! I can remember nothing; perhaps I am dying—dying, unconfessed and unabsolved. Where is Padre Cyrillo, he would give me absolution? Let me confess, let me confess, O Santa Maria, before I die!"

Weary of the scene whose horrors he had no power to soften, heart-sick of the human degradation before him, Sabretasche turned to Madame Riolette:

"Is there no priest you could summon?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur," answered that good little Catholic, warmly. "There is the Père Lavoisier, the curé of Sainte Cécile, and so good a man! He will rise any hour, and go through any weather, to bring a ray of comfort to any soul; and he can speak her language, too, for he is half Italian."

"Send for him," said Sabretasche, briefly, "and show me to another room. You shall be well paid for all your trouble. I knew your patient in other days; I intend to remain here till the surgeon's next visit."

He spoke more briefly and hurriedly than was his wont; but Madame Riolette did not heed it. She would have been only too glad to have him always there, provided he paid as he had done that night, and ushered him with many apologies into the room which had lately witnessed the student's supper. The scent of the air, reeking with stale wine, sickened him; and throwing open one of the small casements he sat down by the open window, leaning out into the cool, silent street, over whose high pointed roofs the grey dawn was growing lighter, and the morning stars larger. He felt a strange, irresistible fascination to stay there till he knew whether this life would revive to be again a curse to his; or whether the icy hand of death would unloose the fetters man refused to sever. Yet they were horrible hours—hours of fear and longing, of dread which seemed so hideously near akin to murder; of wild,

delirious hope, which for his life he could not have chilled; horrible hours to him in which he waited to know whether with another's death existence would bloom anew for him, and from another's grave the flowers of hope spring up in all their glories.

He had bade Madame Riolette let him know when the surgeon had paid his next visit; and awaiting the medical man's opinion, he sat by the open window, while the soft dawn grew clearer and brighter, and the sparrows began to twitter on the house-tops, and the hum of human life to awake in Paris. He sat there for what seemed to him an eternity, his nerves strung to tension, till every slight sound in the street below him, the taking down of the shop shutters, the cry of the water-carriers, the bark of the dogs, jarred upon his brain, and every minute passed heavily away as though it were a cycle of time. His heart beat fast and thick as a knock came on the panels of the door, and it was with difficulty he could steady his voice to give the permission to enter. He expected to see the surgeon; instead, he saw the curé of Sainte Cécile, a mild, silver-haired, gentle-voiced old man, of whom all Madame Riolette's praise was true.

"May I speak to Monsieur?"

"Certainly."

"You know the sufferer to whom I was called?"

Sabretasche bent his head; evasion of the truth never at any moment occurred to him.

"You are her husband?"

The blood rushed over his face; he shrank as from the insult of a blow from the abrupt question which told him that his connexion with the woman who dishonoured his name, who cursed his career, who blotted his escutcheon, and had now sunk so low that any honest day-labourer might have shrunk from acknowledging her as his wife, was no longer a secret, but known so widely that a stranger might unhesitatingly tax him with it.

"By whose authority do you put these questions to me?" he asked, with that careless hauteur which had made the boldest man among his acquaintance pause before he provoked Vivian Sabretasche.

"By no authority, monsieur," replied the priest, mildly, "except that which commands me to do what I think right

without regard to its consequences to me. Under the seal of confession I have heard the sufferer's story; the one her life has sinned against is her husband; him she saw this night standing by her bedside; him she will never now rest without seeing again, to ask his pardon. When Madame Riolette told me of your benevolence to the poor woman who had been found dying in the street, I thought you must be he whom she implores Heaven to bring to her, that she may sue for his forgiveness before the grave closes over her—"

"Is she dying?" His voice was hoarse and inarticulate as he asked the brief question.

"Fast; when another night closes in—nay, most likely when noon is here, she will have ceased to live."

Sabretasche turned to the window, and leaned his forehead on his arm, the blood rushed like lightning through his veins, his breathing was quick and loud, like a man who, having borne a weary burden through a long day of heat and toil, flings it suddenly aside; and his lips moved with a single word, too low to stir the air, but full of inexpressible tenderness and thanksgiving,—the one word, "*Violet!*" Alone he would have bowed his face upon his hands and wept like a woman; in the presence of another he turned with that calm and equable gravity which, until he had last loved, nothing had had power to disturb. The traces of deep and strong emotions were on his face, but he spoke as tranquilly as of old.

"You have guessed rightly; I am her husband by law, though I myself for twenty years have never held, nor would ever hold, myself as bound in any way by moral right to her. She has forfeited all claim or title to call me by such a name. Since you have heard her story—if she have told it to you as truthfully as those of your creed profess to tell everything in their confession—you can judge that an interview between one who has caused, and another who has suffered from, a lifelong wrong, could be productive of peace to neither. I have cared for her, finding her suddenly ill in the streets; I have sent for medical aid; I have given Madame Riolette, and I now give you, full power to do everything that wealth can do to soothe and soften her last moments; beyond that I do not recognise her as my wife, and I refuse to see again a woman who

when I left her, would have sought my life, and who, even now, drove me away from her with curses."

He spoke calmly, but there was a set sternness on his face; compassion had made him act gently to his wife, but it had not banished the haughty and bitter wrath which wronged pride and outraged trust had ever awakened at her memory or her name.

"But, monsieur," interrupted the old curé, gently, "if your wrongs are great, death will soon expiate them; if her errors to you are many, she will be soon judged by a God more merciful, we must all for our own sakes hope, than man is ever to his fellows. I have just administered the last offices to her. I should scarcely have done that had she been still hardened and impenitent. She repents; can any of us do more than that, monsieur? And have not all, even the very best, much of which we *must* repent if we have any conscience left? It is hardly fitting for us to sit in judgment on any other, when in ourselves we have much evil unexamined and unrevealed, and, if there were no outer checks, but constant opportunity and temptation, crime enough in the purest of us to make earth a hell? Your wife repents, monsieur. She has something to confess to you, without which she cannot die in peace, not even in such peace as she may yet win, poor soul! A word from you will calm her, will give her the only comfort she can ever have this side the grave. You have very much to pardon! but oh, monsieur, when you lie on your own death-bed, you will thank God if you have conquered yourself, and not been harsh to her on hers."

They were simple words. The curé of Sainte Cécile had never had much eloquence, and had been chosen for a crowded parish, where kind words and good deeds were more wanted, and better understood, than rounded periods and glowing tropes. They were simple words, but they touched the heart of his auditor, awaking all that was gentle, just, and tolerant in his nature. It was true. What was he, that he should judge?—what his life, that he had title to condemn another? It was the creed he had ever held in that fashionable world, where men and women sin themselves and redeem their errors by raking up scandal, and preaching moral sermons upon others, and seek to hide the holes in their own garments by hooting

after another's rags; it had ever been his creed that toleration, and not severity, was the duty of humanity, and he had sneered with his most subtle wit at those who, from the pulpit or the forum, rebuked the sins they in themselves covered, with their surplices, or their robes. Should he turn apostate from his creed now, when it called him to act up to it? Should he dare to be harsh to this woman, simply because it happened to be against himself that her errors had been committed? He wavered a moment, then —his sense of clemency and justice conquered.

"You are right. I have no title to judge her. I will see her, if you think it best."

And the priest, as he looked up into his face, with its pale and delicate beauty, and its earnest and melancholy eyes, thought "what a noble heart this woman has wronged and thrown away."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### RELEASE.

Alone, Sabretasche mounted the narrow staircase, entered the bed-chamber, and signed to Madame Riolette to leave him there—alone, by the grey faint light of the dawn, he drew near the death-bed of his wife, and stood silently beside her. The opiate the surgeon had given her in his second visit had soothed and calmed her; the wildness and ferocity of her eyes had gone, but the hand of death lay heavily upon her. She looked up at once at him as he stood there, then covered her face with her hands and wept, not loudly or passionately, but long and unrestrainedly, like a child after a great terror.

"I hear that you wished to see me," said Sabretasche, in that low, sweet, melodious tongue in which, long ago, among the orange-trees and olive groves of Tuscany, he had vowed his love-words to her.

She lifted her eyes to his with a shrinking shame and terror that touched him to the core.

"I have wronged you—I have hated you—I have cursed you—I have stood between you and your happiness for

twenty weary years," she moaned. "You can never forgive me—never—never; it were too much to hope! Yet I wanted to see you once before I die; I wanted to tell you all. Even though your last words be a curse upon me, I should have no right to complain. I have deserved it."

"You need not fear my curse," answered Sabretasche, slowly and with effort, as though speech were painful. "If I cannot say I forgive, I am not likely to insult you in your suffering with useless recrimination. We have been separated for one-and-twenty years; I am willing not to evoke the wrongs and dishonour of the past, but to part in such peace as memory will allow."

He spoke gently, but with an involuntary sternness and a deep melancholy, so deep, that it was an unconscious reproach, which struck with a keener pang into the heart of the woman who had wronged him than violent words of fierce upbraiding. She clenched her hands convulsively:

"Do not speak so gently, for God's sake, or you will kill me! I would rather hear you curse, rebuke, reproach, upbraid me; anything rather than those low, soft tones. I have wronged you, hated you, lied to you; robbed you, betrayed you, dishonoured you; to speak so gently to me is to heap coals of fire on my head I repent—I repent, God knows; but, at the eleventh hour, what value is my remorse? For twenty years I have wronged you; what good is it for me to tell you I repent when I am dying, and can harm you no longer if I would?"

Sabretasche was silent; her voice, her gestures, her words struck open his wounds afresh. He felt afresh the cruel, bitter sting of his betrayal: he thought of Violet, of all he had suffered, of all he had made her suffer; and his hatred for the woman who had stood so long between them flamed up in all its strength. He might have pardoned his own wrongs, but the sufferings of the one beloved by him—never!

His wife glanced upward at his averted face, and shivered at the dark look it wore:

"Madre di Dio! you will never forgive me?"

He was silent. Again she repeated her passionate wailing prayer:

"Madre di Dio! you will never forgive me!"

He glanced at her with a shudder and a weary sickening sigh from his heart's depths:

"*I cannot!*"

The words roused the evil in her, which the curé had thought those vain "last offices" had exorcised; the savage passion gleamed again in them, and she sprang up like a dying panther:

"No! because you love your English mistress! Would to Heaven I could live and keep you from her?"

"Silence!" broke in Sabretasche, so sternly that she started and trembled as she heard him. "Never dare to pollute *her* name with your lips! I came at your request, but not to be reproached or questioned. Your own conscience must accuse you of the wrong you did me. For more than twenty years you were content to live upon the gold of the husband you had betrayed. For more than twenty years you have been a clog upon my life, a stain upon my name, a festering wound in my side, a bar from all peace, all happiness; and yet because I could not *prove*, you would not even make the only reparation left in your power—acknowledgment of the wrong you knew had parted us!"

"But I acknowledge it *now!* I repent it *now*, Vivian! No one can do more than that!"

To the lips of the man of the world rose naturally the satire which was habitual. Yes! she confessed and repented now that life was ebbing from her grasp, revenge no longer possible, and acknowledgment unneeded; as people who have played their last card out on earth, turn frightened, with weakened nerve, to God, insulting Him and flattering their priests with "death-bed repentances!" and timorous recantations, which they would have laughed at in their day of better health and stronger brain! But he was too generous and too merciful to utter the sneer which rose involuntarily to his lips, to a woman helpless and dying, who, however bitterly she had betrayed him, was now powerless to harm. The wretched state of a creature he had once loved, struck him with keen pain; her suffering, her poverty her degradation touched him, and he could not look on the utter wreck of what he had last seen, perfect in youth and beauty, without pity, in which his own hate was quenched, his own wrong avenged. He answered her more gently, and very sadly:

"I did not come here to reproach you. Your conscience must know the wrong you did me, and my own life has not been pure enough to give me any title to fling a stone at you."

Well said! Libertine, sceptic, egotist, man of pleasure and fashion, as society called him, he could act up, with his most cruel enemy, to his doctrine of toleration. It is more than most do who preach louder and with more "orthodoxy!" But then Sabretasche did not pretend to be a saint; he was simply a man of honour! She looked at him long and wonderingly: to the fierce, inconstant, and vindictive Tuscan, this justice simply for the sake *of* justice, this toleration, given to her *against* his impulse, merely because he considered it her due, was new and very strange.

"You humble me bitterly," she said, between her teeth. "But I have sinned; it is right punishment. I *did* wrong you. I wedded you because I was sick of being caged in Montepulto. I never loved you; and the solitude you seemed to think like Paradise sickened and annoyed me, till I succeeded in making it a Hell. I cared nothing for anything you cared for; your love of refinement was a constant restraint upon me; your mode of thought and feeling a constant annoyance to me. I grew to hate you, because you were too high, too delicate, too much of a gentleman for me; your superiority jarred upon me, I hated you for it. I hated you even for your affection, your gentleness, your generosity, your sweet temper, which were so many silent rebukes to me. I hated you still more when I loved Fulberto Lani."

As she spoke her lover's name, a shudder of dark loathing passed over his face; he thought of her paramour—coarse, illiterate, low-born, low-bred—and felt, fresh as though dealt him but yesterday, the sting of his wife's infidelity.

"I hated you," went on the Tuscan, rapidly, with the fictitious force given her from the opiate; "and when you surprised him with me, and taxed me, I would not confess to it, for I knew the confession would set you free, and I swore you should rue the fetters with which we had loaded each other. You left me. Well you might! Not long after Lani left me too; he was an idle, worthless, inconstant do-nothing, the lover of half the women in Naples, and

faithful to none. Then—you know how, yearly, my brother extorted from you the money on which we lived? Pepe was extravagant; I lived in gaiety and excitement, and sank lower and lower every day. I should have disgraced you, indeed, if our connexion had been declared to your aristocratic friends! I—a drunkard, *your* wife! At last, after twenty years, we heard that you loved a young English girl; loved her more than you had done other women; loved her so that you would have married her. . . . . ."

She was touching on dangerous chords if she wanted his forgiveness!—his face grew dark, his soft sad eyes stern, and he turned involuntarily from her.

"When we heard that you were in love with her, and that you were going to the south of France, Pepe, unknown to you, followed, and laid in your way the Neapolitan journal with the death of my aunt Sylvia; he knew it was so worded that you would believe I was dead, would deem yourself free, and would marry again where you loved. He guessed rightly; then, thinking to get from you a heavy bribe for silence, he went to you to offer, if you married your young English love, never to betray your connexion with us. You refused. We could not understand your scruples. The signorina would never have known that her marriage was illegal, or that she was not really your wife. You refused, and we were beggared. I had no money to go to law against you to make you provide for me, as Pepe had threatened. We could bribe you no longer, and you went to the war in the East. My brother left me to shift for myself as I might, when he could no longer make money by my name; and I was very poor—how poor *you* cannot think. I have sunk lower and lower, till you have found me a beggar in the streets of Paris. I have done you cruel wrong; I have given you hate for love, betrayal for trust; I have robbed you for twenty years; I have stood between you and your happiness, and gloried in the curse I was to you." . . .

She stopped, panting for breath, and exhausted; and Sabretasche stood looking out of the window at the dawn as it rose clearer and brighter in the fair morning skies. It had been, indeed, God knows, a cruel wrong—a wrong which had stretched over all the years of his prime—a wrong which had stolen all peace and joy from him, and from one far dearer than himself.

"Come here! Come nearer!" said his wife, in faint and hollow tones, as the temporary strength that her cordial had given her faded away.

His face was still white and sternly set as he turned unwillingly.

"Look at me!" she moaned piteously, lifting to his the drawn, thin, sallow face, from which every trace of beauty had long departed; and as he looked he shuddered. "*Now* can you curse me? Has not life avenged you?"

He was silent; if life had avenged his wrongs on her, he felt that it had cursed him for no sin, chastised him for no error, since to that woman, at least, he had given affection and good faith, and had been rewarded by infidelity, ingratitude and hate!

"Say something to me, Vivian," she moaned, in pitiful despair—"say something gentler to me! If you knew what it is to die with the curse of one we have injured on our heads! The past is so horrible, the future so dark! O God! Do not send me down into my grave with your curse upon me, to pursue me through eternity, to hunt me into hell!"

"Hush!" said Sabretasche, his low, soft tones falling with a "peace, be still!" on the storm of remorse and misery before him. "Hush! *I* do not curse you—God forbid—I tell you my own life is not pure enough for me to have any right to condemn yours. If I cannot say that I forgive you—at least I will do my best to think as gently of you as I can, and to forget the past. I cannot promise more."

She caught his hands in hers; she wept, she thanked, she blessed him, with all the excitable vehemence of her national character. Weakened by suffering, terrified by death, she seemed to cling to but one thought, one hope—the forgiveness of the man whose love she had wronged from the hour she had stood with him at the marriage altar, so often the funeral pyre for all man's hopes, and peace and liberty; where, as by the priests of old, living human souls are offered up in cruel holocausts to a fanatic folly!

"I have but one thing more to tell you—I must hasten before my strength fails me," she began, raising herself upon the pillows—"I want to speak to you, Vivian, of my child—your child—"

"The child of such a mother!—I will hear nothing of her!"

"Santa Maria! why?"

"*Why?* Dare you ask? How can I tell that she was mine? And even if she were, what sort of woman must she be, reared by you? You try my forbearance too far. I come here at your desire, I forgive you my own wrongs; but do more—be connected again with the past curse of my life, or recognise in the slightest way any one of the brood that conspired to stain my name, to rob me of my peace, and to bribe me to a lie;—give my name or my countenance to one bred up under the tutelage of those who, shameless themselves, betrayed me in my youth, and tempted me in my manhood to dishonour—once for all, I tell you, woman, that *I will not!*"

He spoke with more impatient anger and passionate bitterness than were often roused in his gentle and indolent nature. She had presumed too far on his forbearance! to try and farm on him a daughter of hers, probably Lani's child, or, if his own, one, whose education and mode of life must have made such as he would blush for, such as he would loathe;—to be asked to give such an one his name—the name that Violet Molyneux would take;—roused all that was haughtiest and darkest in his nature. She had gone too far. The very thought was hateful, abhorrent, loathsome!

"She *was* your child," the Tuscan repeated eagerly—"I swear it, and I should hardly perjure myself on my death-bed! God knows whether she is living now or not; I cannot have harmed her, for I have not seen her ever since she was two years old. I put her out to nurse as soon as she was born, in a village near Naples, with a peasant-woman. Six months after her birth you and I parted, never to meet again till to-night! When the child was two years old her foster-mother brought her to me; she was going far away—I forget where—Calabria, I think, and she could keep her with her no longer. She was very lovely, poor little thing, but she reminded me of you."

"Silence!" broke in Sabretasche, passionately. To have any link of the hated chain of the past cling about him still; to have anyone of this loathsome Tuscan brood forced on him now, when death was nigh to relieve him from the shame which had festered into his soul so long, stung him beyond endurance. The child of such a mother!

—what had he for her but hatred? "Silence! I will not hear her name. I will have none of her; if she press her claim on me I will refuse to acknowledge her. Whether or no she be daughter of mine, I disown her for ever, she is dead to me for ever. Great God! is the madness of my boyhood never to cease from pursuing me!"

The dying woman raised herself on her bed with eager thirsty haste to speak while yet her brain could serve her, while yet her lips could move:

"But you must hear me—you must! I cannot die in peace unless I tell you—she WAS your child!"

"My child or not—she was *yours*, and I disown her! My life shall not be shamed by her, my name shall not be polluted by her."

"But hear me—"

"I *will not*. *If* she be mine, I will acknowledge no daughter of yours. You have dishonoured me enough; my future at least shall be free from you."

"But hear her story—hear her story! You need never see her, never know her, but let me confess all to you—let me die in peace," wailed the wretched woman, piteously. "Before her birth, I never sinned to you; I would not lie now, *now*, on my death-bed, face to face with Satan and Hell! She was not like you, but she had something of your look sometimes, something of your smile; her voice was like yours, too, and—you were her father! and I hated the very sight of her face. She did not like me—how should she! I was a stranger to her. She was unhappy at the loss of her nurse; she was afraid of me; I dare say I was cruel to her. At that time an English gentleman, who was staying at Naples, saw her, and took a great fancy to her. His own little granddaughter, the same age as herself, had lately died; the only relative of any kind he had left to him. She pleased him very much; he fancied he could trace a resemblance between her and his dead grandchild, and, after a time, he offered to adopt her, and to take her to England, to bring her up as if she were his own; that she was not so, no one would know, for his son's little girl, whose parents had both died since her birth, had been born in Italy, and had never been taken home. I was only too glad to be rid for ever of her, she made me think constantly of you, and I hated you more bitterly since I had

wronged you. I let her go, poor little child! I had some conscience left, and I could not bear to hear her voice even in the distance; I could not bear to see her smile, for she seemed to haunt me and reproach me for the wrong I had done her father. I let her go with the Englishman; and I have never seen her since. God knows, wherever she has been she has been better than she would have been with me. I have never seen her; but on Christmas-eve, at Notre Dame, a young girl tendered me charity, and as I looked in her face something struck me as like your child's —as like what she might be as a woman. I do not know—it was very vague—but her smile made me think of you, and she gave me something of that sad, gently pitying look with which you had left me twenty years before. Most likely it was mere fancy—but it made me think of her and you. If I had not sent her from me, I should not be alone in my misery, as I am now!"

She ceased, and tears rolled slowly down her haggard cheeks. All her life this woman had thrown away the human love which had been offered her; without it her death-bed was very cheerless with but two memories beside it—of the husband she had wronged and the child she had deserted.

"You never knew that English stranger, Vivian?" she asked wistfully.

"What was his name?" asked Sabretasche, coldly.

"Tressillian."

"Tressillian!" repeated Sabretasche, with an involuntary start—"Tressillian! And your daughter's name?"

"Was Alma."

"Alma Tressillian! Good God!"

And as things long forgotten recur to memory at a sudden touch akin to them, he remembered how we had noticed her resemblance to his mother's portrait hanging in his drawing-room; how he himself had observed the likeness, though, occupied with other thoughts, it had made no impression upon him; Alma Tressillian his daughter! Little as he had noticed her, now, swift as thought, there came to his mind all he had ever seen or heard of her; he remembered his two visits to St. Crucis; he remembered her extraordinary talent for art—the genius inherited from himself; and—he remembered, too, what Carlton had told that

night in the Crimea, that she was the mistress of Vane Castleton. Was it true? Despite her education, her frankness, her apparent delicacy, had she, indeed, hid unseen within her the leaven of her mother's nature? Had heartlessness, sensuality, treachery of character, been the sole inheritance his wife had bequeathed her child? As these memories and thoughts rushed rapidly and disconnectedly through his brain, she watched the swift changes of expression which swept over his face.

She grasped his arm eageraly:

"You have seen her—you know her, Vivian? What is she like now? Is she a true, fond, pure-hearted woman, or is she like me? Is she cursed with any of my vile passions? If she be, seek her out. For the love of Heaven, find her and redeem her from her fate, if to do it you must tell her how low her mother has fallen; her mother, who loved her less than the very beasts of the field can love their offspring."

To have told this dying wretched woman of that baseless scandal with Vane Castleton, of which he knew nothing, and which all his knowledge of human character made him doubt, would have been brutality. He answered her gently and soothingly:

"I have seen her; or, at least I have seen a lady whom I always heard was Mr. Tressillian's granddaughter; not much of her, it is true, but sufficient to make me think her a 'true, fond, pure-hearted woman'—all that a mother might most long for her daughter to be. Will you swear to me before God that she *was* my child?"

With her national vehemence—that vehemence of expression which Alma had inherited from her—the Tuscan kissed the little ebony crucifix which Madame Riolette had placed before her:

"I swear it, Vivian, as I hope for pardon for my sins from that God whom my whole life has outraged!"

Sabretasche silently bowed his head. He knew that though she might have lied to him the moment before, she would not have dared to swear a falsehood to him by that symbol which her church had taught her to hold so sacred; and though at another hour he would have smiled at the superstition which made an oath sacred, where honour would have been broken ruthlessly, something, despite all

his wrongs, touched him painfully in these hopeless last hours of the woman whom he once had loved in his warm, glad, poetic youth—that youth which she had quenched and ruined with the bitterness of betrayal, and bound down into bondage with the curse of iron chains.

She asked one more question:

"Where did you see her, Vivian?"

"Twice at her own home, and once at the house of one of our English nobles."

"And was she happy?"

"She seemed so."

"Thank God! You will never tell her about me—never mention me to her—never let her know that the mother who neglected her, fell so low and vile, that she was a beggar in the streets; a thing whom she passed by with a dole of charity, with a pitying shudder? Never tell her. Promise me you will not. Why should she hear of me only to know that I first hated and then disgraced her? Promise me, Vivian!"

"I promise!"

Little as she could understand him, she knew him too well to exact an oath from him.

She looked at him wistfully.

"You are very noble! You shame me more with your goodness than you have done with curses and reproaches."

"No," answered Sabretasche, gently. "I have no claim to virtue. My life has been far too full of errors and self-indulgence, for me to have title left to give me right to condemn another. If you have sinned, so have I. No human beings are spotless enough to judge each other. As for curses, God forbid! They would be rancorous indeed, to follow you to the grave."

She gave a weary sigh; his forgiveness humbled and shamed her more than any upbraidings. Then her eyes closed, and she lay still. All the extraneous strength and vigour, given her by cordial and opium, had died away. She lay still, her breathing short and weak, her brow contracted, her limbs exhausted and powerless, the hand of death heavy upon her! her lips apart, her cheeks grey and hollow, her brain confused, and weighed down with the cloudy thoughts, and memories, and fears which haunted her last hours.

And Sabretasche stood beside her, musing on the strange accident which had led him to the death-bed of the woman who had made all the misery of his life; of that cruel and inexorable tie which had bound him for so long; of the deep, unsolved problem of human nature; that book written in such different language for every reader, that it is little marvel that every man thinks his own the universal tongue, and fails even to spell out his brothers' translation of it. This woman had hated him; he had loathed her; they had been chained together by a rite the world chose to call indissoluble; they had been parted by a fierce and ineffaceable wrong; after twenty years' severance, what could this man and woman, once connected by the closest tie, once parted by the hottest passions, know of each other? what could they read of each other's heart? what could they tell or understand of each other's temptations, sufferings, and errors? And yet Church and Law, in mock morality, God help us! had bound them together, till Death, more powerful and more kindly than their fellow-men, should come to the rescue and release them!

That lifelong union of Marriage! Verily, to enter into it, it needs a great and an abiding love.

So he stood watching beside his dying wife. A future, fond and radiant, lay for him in the soft haze of coming years; yet, ere he turned to it, he paused a moment to look back to the past, to its sorrow, its sin, its trial, its conflict, its bitter wrongs. And with a new-born and unutterable happiness awaking in him, a saddened pity stole over him for the broken wreck of humanity which lay in its last feeble life-throbs before his eyes; and hatred, resentment, scorn, faded away, quenched in deep compassion. If his character had been hers, his impulses, opportunities, education, temptation hers, how could he tell but what his sins had been like hers also? They were such, indeed, to him, whose nature was generosity, and idol honour, as seemed darkest and most loathsome; but in that dying chamber he bowed his head, and turned his eyes away from them. Just and tolerant to the last, he held it not his office to condemn —now, above all, when Death came as his avenger.

So he stood and watched beside his dying wife, the woman who had wedded him only to emancipate herself from an irksome home, and who had been a ruthless barrier

between himself and liberty and peace—stood and watched her, while without, the bright morning light dawned in the eastern skies, and the song of the birds made sweet music beneath the eaves, and the soft western winds swept in through the casement into the chamber of the dying; herald of the Life born for him, and come to him, out of Death. Suddenly her eyes unclosed with a vague, lifeless stare, and she awoke to semi-consciousness as the bells of Notre Dame chimed the hour of seven—awoke startled, dreamy, delirious.

"Hark! there is the church-bell. What is it? Ah! I remember, we used to gather the lilies and the orange-flowers to dress up the high altar at home. I wish I could go there once—just once before I die, to see the vineyards, and the wheat-fields, and the olive-groves again. There are such sweet warm winds, such bright glowing skies—ah! I was happy, I was innocent, I was sinless *there!* Why are those bells ringing? Are they for early mass? No; it is the Angelus. I forgot! We must take lilies, plenty of lilies for the altar; but *I* must not touch them, I should soil them, the lilies are so pure, so spotless, and I am so sunk, so polluted; . . . . the lilies would wither if *my* hands touched them, and the priests would thrust me from the altar, and the Virgin would ask me for my child. I used to pray; I cannot now! Hark! those bells are ringing, and I know the words, but I cannot say them . . . Help me, help me. Pray, pray; do you hear—pray."

With piteous agony the cry rang out on the still air of the breaking day, as the dews gathered gray and thick upon her brow, and the glazing mist came over her sight, and in the darkness of coming death she struggled for memory and prayer, as a child gropes in the gloom.

"Pray—pray. What are the words? Say them—in pity—in mercy! *He* has forgiven;—God will forgive! Pray—pray!"

And the voice of the man whom her life had wronged, fell softly on her ear through the dull, dizzy mists of death, as he bent over her and uttered with soothing pity the words of her Church, the prayer of her childhood, which from his lips to her was the seal of an eternal and compassionate Pardon:—

Pater noster qui es in cœlis, sanctificetur nomen tuum: adveniat regnum tuum: fiat voluntas tua sicut in cœlo et in terra; panem

nostrum, quotidianum, da nobis hodie; et dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris; et ne nos inducas in tentationem sed libera nos à malo. Amen!

Standing beside his dying wife, he spoke the prayer to the One Creator—the prayer which should have no Creeds; and as the old familiar words winged their way to her, bringing on their echoes memories of days long past, and innocence long lost, the wild eyes grew tamer, the bent brow relaxed, the hardened lines of age and vice grew soft; and before the last Amen had left his lips, with one faint, broken, mournful sigh,—she died. And he standing beside her, bowed his head in reverence, before the great mystery of life and death; and thanked God that his last words to her had been of mercy and of pardon, that his last words had been to her, even as the words of Arthur unto Guinevere—

> All is passed; the sin is sinned; and I,
> Lo! I forgive thee, as eternal God
> Forgives; do thou for thine own soul the rest.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### IN THE FOREST OF FONTAINEBLEAU.

On the meeting of those so long held apart by the laws of Man, I need not dwell. Nothing now stood between them; and within a few days of the night that Sabretasche had arrived in Paris, Violet Molyneux became his wife.

No empty conventionalities kept them apart; they cared nothing what the world wondered, or how it talked; and they never thought of the malicious versions of their story, which were the one theme in Parisian salons. They went to the south of France for the whole of the coming year, to be away from that gay effervescing world of which both were weary; and, under the purple skies, in the golden air, and amidst the luxurious solitudes of the Midi, shut out from those who had caressed, adored, and slandered him, far from the fret and hum and buz of outer life, Sabretasche surrendered himself to that love which gave him back the

dreams of his lost youth, and even as night slinks away before the fullness of the dawn, so the shadows of his past fell behind him for evermore.

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Sabretasche kept his promise. Alma never knew that it was to her own mother she had given charity after midnight mass at the doors of Notre Dame. All that had passed in that last interview with his dead wife, he told to Violet. To find in Alma the daughter of her own lover—that child whom she had hated with the fond, jealous vehemence with which a woman who loves hates all or anything that has any tie to, or connection with, her lover, or shows that another has been as near to him as she;—was intensely painful to her.

"Your child and *hers!*" she repeated. "I can never see her again! Do not ask me, I should never look upon her face without recalling her mother—the traitorous wife who could betray *you!*"

That was her first impulse; but her sense of justice conquered this. If she had never known her before, nothing on earth would have induced her to see the daughter of his dead wife; and he noticed the involuntary shudder with which she first met Alma, after his relation of her connection with himself; but she was too generous and too just to allow the feeling influence; and in truth, for I do not wish to claim for her any virtue she does not possess, she was too full of trembling gratitude at her own joy to bear a harsh thought to any soul on earth.

Bound by his promise to his wife, Sabretasche had been undecided whether or not to tell his daughter of the relation there was between them. It was almost impossible to do so without letting her learn, at least in some degree, what her mother's character and life had been; her first question so naturally would be about her mother, her dead mother, of whom she would be anxious to hear all. He had nothing to say but what would pain her; nothing but what would compel him to break his last promise to the dead. Moreover it would have seemed a useless cruelty to rend asunder the happy associations and belief of twenty years, to substitute in their stead, a parentage that must give her pain.

He felt himself also, no pleasure at the discovery, nor

any sudden affection for her sprung up in the night like a mushroom, after the custom of men who find unknown daughters in romances, and are prepared to be devoted to them, good or bad, interesting or uninteresting, from the simple fact of their being their own children. On the contrary, to know that there was one living who bore in her the blood of the wife who had been his curse, was keenly painful to him; and he shrank from any remembrance or acknowledgment to the world, of her tie to himself. But for De Vigne's sake, he had been interested in her before and for this, he strove to conquer the repugnance that he felt to her from her mother; and wished to place her above the necessity of relying upon her talents, and to give her that position in the world, to which her adoption by Tressilian, as well as her relationship to himself, entitled her. To do this was difficult, without telling her what he wished to avoid; but he placed in Lord Molyneux's hands (to whom he told all) a sum sufficient to maintain her in affluence, which, relying on her ignorance of law, could be given her as a remnant of the property of her grandfather, suddenly repaid by those who had swindled him of it. And Alma heard the Viscount's relation of her sudden inheritance, unsuspicious that any other story was concealed behind it; she was too ignorant of all legal matters to detect any flaw there might be in the tale; she knew her grandfather had lost an immense fortune in the bank and in speculation; she was not surprised a small portion should be recovered unexpectedly. Indeed, beyond thanking Lord Molyneux for having so kindly interested himself in her concerns, the subject occupied but few of her thoughts; for the moment that she had seen Sabretasche in the salons of the Molyneux hotel, and that he had recognised her kindly and courteously, she had asked him for De Vigne, and he had told her that he had been detained in Scutari, and would soon come home, through Paris.

"Is the curse of the marriage-tie to fall there too?" thought Sabretesche. "How will it end for them both?"

It was early morning when De Vigne arrived in Paris.

Alma's letter had sent new life and strength into his veins; from that hour he recovered sufficiently to be moved on board the yacht of a man we knew, who, having come cruising about the Bosphorus, offered to give us a run to

Marseilles. The sea air completed the recovery which her letter had begun; he lay on the deck smoking, and breathing in with the fresh Mediterranean wind his old health and strength, and by the time the 'Sea-foam' ran into harbour he was himself again.

It was early morning when we reached Paris—a bright spring morning in May. After the discomfort, the dirt, the myriad disgreeables of Constantinople; after the mud and rain and snow and cheerlessness of the Crimea; how gay and pleasant looked those sunny streets of Paris, where primroses and violets, cassi and lemonade, were being cried; where Polichinelle was performing, and char-à-bancs starting with light-hearted students for a day in the Bois de Boulogne; and everywhere around us we heard chattering, laughing, voluble, musical, that silvery, pleasant language, as familiar to us as our own! What a contrast it was!—a contrast very agreeable, let a man be ever so *voué au tambour*, after nearly two years such campaigning as we had tasted in the Crimea!

I drove at once to the Gare de Strasbourg on my way to England; De Vigne remained in Paris; he had an oath of vengeance to work out; a purpose to be wrought, that in the old Pagan creed he held as righteous. And, to keep the vow which he had sworn, he went straight from the Station to the Rue Lafitte, to a house which stood near the Maison Dorée, and of which the various floors were let to various English bachelors whose *hivernages* were annually Paris.

Castleton sat in his chambers, smoking, breakfasting, reading the papers, and chatting with two of his particular chums, who had dropped in after keeping it up all the night through, in private salons of the Café Anglais. Castleton was hardly up to the mark that morning; he was annoyed and irritated at several things; first, that he had serious doubts as to the soundness of Lancer's off-leg, and if Lancer did not come in winner of the Derby, Lord Vane's prospects would look blacker than would be desirable; in the second, the Ministry had behaved with the grossest ingratitude, by refusing him, through his father, a certain post he coveted, a piece of ill-natured squeamishness on their part, as they had but lately given a deanery to his brother, a spirit rather worse than himself; in the third, a

larger number of little bills were floating about than was pleasant, and if there were not speedily a general election, by which he could slip into one of those neat little boroughs that were honoured by being kept in his Grace of Tiara's pocket, he was likely to be troubled with more applications than he could, not alone meet—of that he never thought—but stave off to some dim future era. Altogether, Castleton was not in an over-good humour that morning; had sworn at his valet, and lashed his terrier till it howled, and found everything at cross purposes and a bore, from his chocolate, which was badly milled, to the news he had lately heard, that the woman whose childish hand had struck him for a coward's deed, was in Paris with those who, if her lips revealed to them the outrage he had once attempted, would fearfully and bitterly avenge it on his head. So altogether things looked dark; and they looked no better when, on issuing from his chamber to go to the drag that awaited him in the street below, he came suddenly face to face with the man he hated and feared, because he was the man that Alma loved.

They met abruptly on the stairs as the one was quitting, the other approaching, the landing-place — they met abruptly, with barely a foot between them—De Vigne and Vane Castleton; he who had insulted her past all forgiveness, and he who would not have seen a hair of her head injured without revenging it. Involuntarily, they both stood silent for a moment. De Vigne looked at him, every vein a'flame with passion, recalling all that she had told him had been poured into her young ear in that horrible hour. His lips were pale, and set with a stern fixed purpose; his eyes burning with the hatred that was rioting within him; his right hand clenching hard on the riding-switch he held, as if he longed to change it into a deadlier and more dangerous weapon. He seemed to hear Castleton's hateful love-vows, and her piteous cry of terror and supplication; he seemed to see the loathsome caress with which he had dared to touch her lips; he seemed to feel her struggling, as if for life and death, in the vulture clutches of her hated foe! What wonder that his hand clenched on his whip, as if thirsting for that surer and deadlier weapon with which, in other days, his grandsires had defended their honour and their love!

Castleton was no coward—had he been, the Tiara blood, bad though it might be in other ways, would have disowned him—yet at the eagle eyes that flashed so suddenly upon him, his own fell for an instant. But only *for* an instant; he recovered himself to have the first word, with a sneer on his lips and in his cold, light eyes:

"De Vigne! My dear fellow, how are you? Didn't know you were in France. Come to rest yourself from that deuced hard campaign, eh?'

"No," said De Vigne, between his teeth, which were set like a lion's at sight of his foe. "I am come for a harder task—to try and teach a scoundrel what honour and dishonour mean!"

His tones were too significant to leave Castleton in any doubt as to the application of his words. He drew in his lips with a nervous, savage twitch. He laughed, with a forced sneer.

"Jealous! Are you come to bully me about that little girls of yours—what was her name—something with a Tre, I know? Really you will waste your wrath and your powder. I have nothing whatever to do with her; she did not take *me* in." . . . .

The words had barely passed his lips before De Vigne's grasp was on him, tight, firm, relentless; he might with as much use have tried to escape from the iron jaws of a tiger seeking his prey, as from the grasp of the man who loved the woman he had insulted. De Vigne's face was white with passion, his eyes burning with fiery anger, the wrath that was in him quivering and thrilling in every vein and sinew—to hear her name on that liar's lips. He seized him in his iron grasp, and shook him like a little dog.

"Blackguard! that is the last of your dastard lies you shall ever dare to utter! You are too low for the revenge one man of honour takes upon another; you are only fit to be punished as one punishes a yelping mongrel or a sneaking hound!—"

Holding him there, powerless, in the grip of his left hand, he thrashed him with his riding-switch as a man would thrash a cur—thrashed him with all the passion that was in him, till the little whip snapped in two. Then he lifted him up as one would lift a dead rat or a broken bough, and threw him down the whole stone flight of the

staircase: in his wrath, he seemed to have the strength of a giant.

Castleton lay at the foot of the stairs, stunned and insensible. His valet and the people of the house gazed on the scene, too amazed to interrupt it or aid him. His two friends standing in the street criticising the roans in his drag, rushed in at the echo of the fall. De Vigne stepped over his body, giving it a spurn with his foot as he passed.

"The deuce, De Vigne!" began one of them. "What's up—what's amiss?"

De Vigne laughed—a haughty sneer upon his face:

"Only a little lesson given to your friend, Lord Monckton. Few will disagree with me in thinking it wanted; if they do, I can be heard of at the Hôtel de Londres. Good day to you!"

As he walked out into the street to his horse, which was waiting for him, a small, sleek, fair man came up to him with a deferential ceremoniousness.

"I beg your pardon, Major, for intruding; but might I be allowed to inquire whether you received a letter from me when you were before Sebastopol?"

De Vigne signed him away with the broken handle of his whip:

"When I discharge my servants, I do not expect to be followed and annoyed with their impertinence."

"I mean no impertinence, Major," persisted the man, "and I should not be likely to intrude upon you without some warrant, sir. Did you read my letter?"

"Read it? Do you suppose I read the begging-letters with which rogues pester me? It is no use to waste your words here. Take yourself off!"

He spoke haughtily and angrily, as he put his foot in the stirrup; he remembered the share Raymond, then in Castleton's employ, had taken in that vile plot, but he could not degrade her by bringing her name up to a servant, and lower himself by stooping to resent the mere hired villany of Castleton's abettor.

"It was not a begging-letter, Major. It would have told you something of great importance to you, sir, if you had chosen to read it."

"Silence!" said De Vigne, as he threw himself across the saddle, shook the bridle from his grasp, and rode away

up the Rue Lafitte, turning towards the hotel in the Champs Elysées, whence that letter, he had returned unread, he remembered had been dated by Alma, and bestowing no more thought on his quondam valet, in the passion that still flamed in him, despite his vengeance.

He could have slain Castleton, the man who would have robbed him of his one earthly treasure; who *had* robbed him of her for two years. He could have slain him, the man who had polluted her name by association with his; who had dared to profane those young lips with his loathed and brutal caresses. He could have slain him, as Moses slew the Egyptian, in the fiery wrath and hatred of the moment; but he refrained, as David refrained from slaying Saul, when the man who had wronged him lay in his power, sleeping and defenceless, in the still gloom of midnight. Oh! mes frères, virtue lies not, as some think, in being too pure for temptation to enter into us, but rather in proportion to the strength of the seduction and the power of temptation we resist. If there be such to whom like temptation never come, happy for them, their path through life is safe and easy. If they never know the delicious perfume of the rose-garland, they never know the bitterness of the fennel and amarinth; yet closer to human sympathies and dearer to human hearts—nobler, warmer, more natural—is the man who loves and hates, errs, struggles, and repents; is quick to joy and quick to pain; who sins in haste, but is ever ready to atone, and who, though passing through the fire of his own thoughts, comes like gold worthier from the furnace.

Vane Castleton rose from that fall, sunk and degraded for ever. He had been thrashed by De Vigne as a hound by its keeper; he knew that stigma would cling to him as long as he lived. Monckton, his valet, his groom, the people of the house, had all seen it; seen him powerless in De Vigne's grasp; seen him held and lashed, like a yelping puppy in a hunting-field. The tale would be told in circles of all classes; it would spread like wildfire. No food so dear to the generality as gossip—above all, gossip spiced with scandal—it would be known in his club, in his clique, all over town. Monckton lost no time in detailing, at the Circle, how "that dare-devil De Vigne pitched into poor Vane. Some row about a woman, I don't know who; but

I can swear to the severity of the thrashing; and he kicked him afterwards, by Jove! he did. Somebody should send it to the papers!"

Alma was amply revenged. Castleton's debts, his difficulties, his bad odour in general, crowned by the story of a horsewhipping that he did not dare *revenge*, made it impossible to stay, cut by every man worth knowing: all his daily haunts, filled by old acquaintances, who either dropped him entirely, or shook him off as plainly as they could; every house where he was wont to dine or lounge away his hours, full of the story; Paris and London closed as effectually as though everybody had ostracised him. He did not wait his ostracism, but fearful lest law should take further cognisance of his attempted evil deed, slunk out of Paris before nightfall. He now usually lives about the Bads; his society is not what one of the ducal house of Tiara might reasonably expect, and they tell me there is no more dangerous hand at trapping young pigeons, and fleecing them of all their valuable feathers. It is rather an unworthy office for one of his order, but nature will out, and it will have the best of the game, and so—Vane Castleton, with a great name, a good position, and every chance to make fair running in the race of life if he had chosen, born with the nature of the bully and the sharper in him, sank at last, despite all, to their level.

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Arrived at the hotel in the Champs Elysées, De Vigne found, to his amazement, that it was Lord Molyneux's, and was told, in words, which were black letter to him, that Mademoiselle Tressillian was not there, but had gone to the Duchesse de La Vieillecour's villa, the Diaman du Forêt, at Fontainebleau; "every one knew the villa; Monsieur would be certain to find it; and Mademoiselle had left word that her address was to be given to anyone who called." With which assurance the porter returned to his plate of onion soup inside his den; and De Vigne, bewildered, rode on to the *Gare* for Fontainebleau.

Minutes seemed to him hours; the train appeared to creep along its weary ironway; everything was strange to him. Her close acquaintance with the Molyneux appeared inexplicable. The letter that vowed her love to him had been written nearly two years before. Since then she might have changed; she might have loved some other; she might

even have pledged herself to another man? He tortured himself with every form of dread and doubt, as the train dragged on till it stopped at Fontainebleau, the sun shining on the quiet French town, on the stately historic castle, on the deep majestic woods that saw the loves of Henri Quatre, the beauty of Gabrielle d'Estrées, the death of the grand Condé, and the despair of the man who, abandoned alike by his Courtiers whom he had ennobled, his Marshals, whom he had created, and his People whom he had rescued from the bloody fangs of The Terror, signed the act of his abdication in his favourite palace, were that child was baptized who has lived to restore his name and to ascend his throne.

The train stopped, and he went at once to the Hôtel de la Ville de Lyon, where, fifteen or sixteen years before, he remembered giving a brilliant dinner to Rose Luillhier, then first dancer of the Opéra, a gay, flippant little blonde, whom he had driven round, in a four-in-hand, by the Carrefour des Boux and Franchard to see the Roche qui Pleure, and had drunk champagne and sung Béranger songs, and enjoyed his Bacchanalia with all the joyous, careless, revelry of spirits undamped and unwearied.

*Now*, Rose Luillhier was a faded, ugly, brokendown woman, who, falling through a trap-door, and ruining her beauty for ever, had been glad to keep a Mont de Piété in a small way, in a dingy, dark, loathsome hole in the Faubourg d'Enfer; and he—he dared not trust his present; he dared not look at his future!

He inquired the way to Madame de la Vieillecour's maison de plaisance. It lay on the other side of the forest to the south-west, they told him, and they had not a carriage left in the coach-house, nor a horse in the stable, there were so many pleasure parties to the forest or the palace in this month. He went to the Londres, to the Nord, to the Aigle Noir, to the Lion d'Or; all their conveyances were hired. It was a saint's day and a holiday in Paris, and numerous parties of every grade, had come to spend the sweet spring-hours in the leafy shades, and majestic *futailles*, of Fontainebleau. He went to Nargein's and to Bernard's, in the Rue de France; but he could find no conveyance there. Impatient of delay, he asked how far it was to walk.

"Mais à peu près sept kilomètres, monsieur," said the

man of whom he inquired. "Voyez donc, monsieur! Vous partirez par la Barrière de Paris, suivrez le chemin de chasse jusqu'à la Batte des Aires, prendrez le sentier jusqu' au forêt du Gros Fouteau, après cela le sentier de l'Amitié, et aux Gorges de la Solle, monsieur—"

De Vigne heard no more of the Frenchman's voluble and bewildering directions; a fierce oath broke from him under his breath, as three carriages swept past him. In the first sat a young Parisian *lion*, and—the woman who called herself his Wife! From under her parasol in pink silk and lace, as she leaned forward, full-blown, high-coloured, coarse, with a smile on her lips, and that vindictive triumph in her cruel eyes which he knew so well, he saw her face—that face unseen for eleven long years, since the day he had thrown her from him in the chapel of Vigne. He knew her in an instant, despite every alteration—and they were not few that time had made—and faint and sick, he reeled against the wall of Nargein's dwelling.

The Trefusis, the woman whom he so unutterably loathed, so fiercely hated! Was it prophetic that this fiend should for ever stand between him and the better angel of his life! She knew him, too, for she started visibly; then she leant forward and bowed to him, with a cruel, mocking, leering smile.

"Who's that fine man, *ma belle?*" asked Anatole de Beauvoisier.

"My husband!" answered the Trefusis, with her coarse, harsh laugh.

Anatole had a great admiration for this handsome English woman, yet he estimated her rightly enough to murmur to himself, "Poor devil! Don't I pity him!"

A deadly sickness came over De Vigne, and a fierce ungovernable thirst for vengeance on her entered into him. He hated her so unspeakably! That woman who stood an eternal bar between him, and love, and peace and honour!

He broke from Nargein's foreman with a hasty douceur, and took the route by the Barrière de Paris, trusting to memory to lead him across the forest, in the direction of the Diaman du Forêt. He followed the hunting-path that leads to the magnificent forest of the Grand Fouteau. It was now afternoon, and the soft golden sunlight turned to bronze the giant boles of the old oaks. All around him was

hushed in the heart of the great royal forest; and the birds were singing in the dense foliage of those shadowy avenues, that had used to echo with the bay of hounds, the ring of horses' hoofs, the mellow notes of hunting calls, when through their sunny glades the gay courtiers of Valois, Navarre, and Bourbon, had ridden for the pleasure of the Chasse and the Curée. All was silent around him, save for the musical murmur, nameless yet distinguishable, as of the coming summer breathing its life and spirit into the tender leaves, the waving grasses, and the waters of lake and fountain, long chilled and silenced by the iron touch of the past winter. He strode along through the hunting-path, edged on one side with brushwood and on the other with the great forest trees, only thinking sufficiently of the way he went to take the paths that bore to the north-west, and struck into the Fulaci du Gros Fouteau, knowing that by keeping to his left, he should come upon the road to Chailly, brushing his way hastily through the tangled forest-branches that had stood the sunshine and the storm of centuries. As he swung along, he glanced upwards to put aside the boughs; and—with an inarticulate cry, sprang forward.

Half sitting, half lying on the fallen trunk of a beech that had been struck by lightning a few days before, the sunshine falling down through the thick branches on her, he saw once more the woman he loved!

In another moment she was on his heart, clinging there as if no earthly power should ever part them, weeping and laughing in her agony of gladness, while he held her in his embrace, crushing her against his breast, their long caresses more eloquent than words. Then Alma raised her face to his, flushing with a bright rich glow, her arms clinging closer and closer round him:

"You do not doubt me now? You will never leave me—never?"

"Never, my God!" And as he poured out upon her in his kisses the passion which words were too cold and tame to utter, he forgot—utterly, entirely—that cold, cruel jeering face which had passed him but an hour before, and—forgot, also, the ties that bound him.

Their joy was too deep for tranquillity; all she cared for was to look up into his eyes; all he cared for was to drink

of the fresh sweet waters of human affection; to lavish on the only thing he loved all the pent-up well-springs of his heart; to hold her there close—close, so that none could come to rob him of her a second time—the one lost to him for so long!

Do you wonder at him? Go and travel in Sahara, across that great, dreary, blinding, shadowless, hopeless plain of glaring yellow sand, where you see no living thing save the vulture whirling aloft awaiting some dead camel ere it can make its loathsome feast; travel with the thirst of the desert upon you, your throat parching, your eyes starting, your whole frame quivering with longing for the simple drop of water which your fellows fling away unvalued. When you came to the clear cool springs flowing under the friendly shadows of the banyans and the palms, would you have the courage to turn away and leave the draught untasted, and go back alone into the desert to die?

It was long before they could speak of what they had both suffered, when at last she told him all, more fully than her letter had done, of Castleton's brutality, the dark fierce blood surged over his brow, and in his teeth he muttered a fierce oath.

"By Heaven! I wish I had not let him go with life!"

"What are you saying?" she whispered.

He kissed the lips he would not answer;

"Do not ask! To think that dastard villain dared to lay his hand upon you wakes crime in me! My darling, my precious one! to think that brute should have ventured to lure you in his hateful toils, should have polluted your ears with his loathsome vows, should have dared to touch your little hand with his—"

He stopped; his fierce anger overmastered him. To think the dastard love, which was poison to any woman, should have been breathed on *her*, on whom he would have had the summer wind never play too rudely; to think that his hated kiss should have ventured to touch those soft warm lips, pure as ungathered rose-leaves, which were consecrated wholly to himself!

"Do not grieve at it!" whispered Alma, caressingly. "Do not think of it. Now I have *you* I could pardon anything. When life is beautiful and God's mercy great, one cannot harbour hard thoughts of any one? It is when we *suffer* that we could revenge."

He pressed her closer to his heart:

"You are better than I, my little one!"

"No!" she murmured passionately, "I am better than none; still less than you, noble as you are in thought and in deed, in heart and in soul. Ah! I loved and reverenced you before; but since your courage, your suffering, your daring, I love you more dearly, I reverence you more sacredly than ever, my love, my lord, my husband!"

As the last words fell on his ear, De Vigne started as at a mortal wound from the steel! That title from her lips struck him keenly, bitterly as any sword-thrust! To have to tell her he had deceived her, to have to give a death-blow to his unsuspicious confidence, this radiant, shadowless happiness with which she clung to him, as if, now they were together, life had brought her heaven upon earth; to have to quench the light in her sunny eyes, and tell her that another called him by that name!

The hand that held both hers trembled: the glow faded off his face; his heart turned sick; how could he tell her that for two long years the secret of his life had been withheld from her—that, married, he had gone to her as a free man—that, bound himself, he had won her love—that he had gone on from day to day, from week to week, with that fatal tie unacknowledged, that dark and cruel secret unconfessed? And she looked up in his face, as she clung to him, with such a world of worship, such eager joy in her brilliant, loving eyes, that seemed never to weary of gazing into his! And he had to say to her: "Your trust is unmerited! I have deceived *you*!"

Unconsciously the woman, who would have perilled her life to save him a single pang, struck a yet sharper blow to the just-opened wound! Noticing the gloom that gathered in his eyes, to dispel it, she laughed, with her old gay childlike insouciance:

"Yes! in one thing I *am* better than you; I have more faith! You could think evil of me, but *I* never dreamt of doubting *you*. I would have disbelieved angels had they come to witness against you; in your absence none should dare to slander you to me; and if they had brought proofs of every force under the sun, I would have thrown them in their teeth as falsehoods and as forgeries, if they had stained *your* honour!

She spoke, her rich low voice, thrilling with that eloquence which always came to her when roused to deep emotion or to warm excitement. Yet—every one of those noble and tender words quivered like a knife in his heart! He bent his head till his brow rested on her hair; and the man, whose iron nerves had not quailed, nor pulse beat one shade quicker, before the deadly flame blazing from the thirty guns at Balaklava, shuddered as he thought, "How can I tell her that I have deceived her!"

"Stop, stop—for the love of Heaven," he muttered, "or you will kill me!"

He felt his heart would break, his brain give way, if she said another word to add to the coals of fire she was heaping on his head! Her unconscious gladness, her noble faith seemed to brand his soul with shame and suffering, which years would never have power to efface;—to have to answer her with what would quench and darken all her glad and generous faith, and, for aught he knew, turn her from him for ever.

Startled and terrified, she tried to look into his face; but his head was bent, so that she could see nothing save the blue veins swelling on his forehead.

"What have I said—what have I done?" she cried, piteously. "Speak to me, answer me, for Heaven's sake!"

He did not answer her. What could he say? The veins on his temples grew like cords, and over his face stole that dead grey pallor which had overspread it upon his marriage day. A vague and horrible terror came upon the woman who loved him. She threw her arms round his neck; she pressed her warm lips to his forehead, pale and lined with the bitter thoughts in his brain; she only thought of him then, never of herself.

"Tell me, what *have* I said—I, who would give my life to spare you the slightest pain?"

He seized her in his arms; he pressed her against his heart, throbbing to suffocation:

"My worshipped darling! do not speak gently to me! Hate me! Curse me! . . . That woman—who came to you—*is* my wife!"

It was told at last—the stain on his name, the curse on his life, the secret kept so long! Her face was raised to

his; its fair bloom changed to his own bloodless and lifeless pallor, her eyes wide open, with a vague, amazed horror in them. She scarcely understood what he had said; she could not realize it in the faintest shadow.

"Your wife!" she repeated, mechanically, after him. *Your wife!* You are jesting, you are trying me;—it is not true!"

He held her closer to him, and rested his lips on her hair; he could not bear to see those fond, frank eyes gaze into his with that pitiful terror, that haunting, pleading earnestness, which would not believe even his own words against him!

"God forgive me, it *is* true!"

With a cry that rang through the forest silence, she bowed down before the blow dealt to her by the hand that she loved best. She did not weep like most women, but the blood rushed to her face, then left it white and colourless as death. She pressed her hand upon her heart, struggling for breath, looking up in his face as a spaniel that its master had slain would look up in his, the love outliving and pardoning the death-blow.

For the moment he thought he had killed her. In an insanity of anguish he called upon her name; he covered her blanched lips with kisses; he vowed to God that he loved her dearer than any husband ever loved his wife; that he hated the woman who bore his name, whom he had left from the very altar! He called her his own, his love, his darling; he swore never to leave her while his life lasted; he besought her, if ever she had cared for him, to look at him, and tell him she forgave him!

She did not shrink from, but clung to, him, breathless, trembling, quivering with pain, like a delicate animal after a cruel blow.

"Forgive you! Yes! What would *I* not forgive! But—"

Her voice broke down in convulsive sobs, and she lay in his arms weeping unrestrainedly, with all the force and vehemence of her nature; while he bowed his head over her, and his own bitter, scorching tears fell on her golden hair. He let her weep on and on. He could not speak to her; he could only clasp her to him, murmuring broken earnest words of agonised remorse.

Once she looked up at him with those radiant eyes, from which he had quenched the light and glory:

"You do not love her? You cannot!"

There was her old vehemence in the question—as passionately he answered her:

"Love her! Great Heaven! No word could tell how I *hate* her! how I have hated her ever since that cursed day when she first took my name, to stain it and dishonour it. My precious one! my hate for her is as great as my love for you; greater it cannot be!"

"And yet she is your wife! O God, have pity on us!"

Her lips turned white as if in bodily pain, her eyes closed, and she shivered as with great cold.

He pressed her against his heart; great drops of suffering stood upon his brow. It was an agony greater than death to him to see the misery on her face, and to know that he had brought it there—he who would have sheltered her from every chill breath, guarded her from every touch of the sorrow common to all human kind!

"Would to Heaven I had died before my selfish passions brought my curse on your young head," he muttered, as he bent over her. "You forgive me—but you cannot love me after I have deceived you! You cannot love me, false as I have been to truth and honour! God knows I meant no deliberate wrong. I never sought you as libertines will seek. I never knew I loved you till the day I spoke my love—the day we parted! I had gone on and on, without thinking that I lived a lie! You cannot love me after this;—nor pity me, though I have sunk so low?"

Breathless he waited for her answer—breathless and trembling, his face white as hers, his haughty lips quivering, his head bent and humbled, as he made the hardest, yet the noblest confession a proud man can ever make—"*I was wrong!*"

She lifted her face to his, in the first bitterness of her grief her thought was of him and not of herself.

"Love you? I *must* while my life lasts. Nothing could change me to you; if you were to err, to alter, to fall as low as man can fall, if all the world stoned and hooted you, *I* would cling the closer to you, and we would defy it, or endure it—*together!*"

She spoke with her old vehemence, her arms twining

close about his neck, her lips soft and warm against his cheek, her eyes gazing up into his, brilliant with the love that was the life of her life; then—the passion faded from her eyes, the glow from her face; with a convulsive sob her head drooped upon her breast, and she fell forward on his arm, weeping hopelessly, wearily, agonisedly, as women in the Crimea wept over their husbands' graves.

"God help me! I do not know what I say! If I am wrong, tell me; if I sin, slay me—but cease to love you I *cannot!*"

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE CROWNING TEMPTATION OF A TEMPTED LIFE.

In a few broken, earnest words, De Vigne told her the history of that fatal marriage-bond which had cost his mother's life, stained his name, banished him from his home, cursed his life with a bitter and futile regret, and now brought misery on a life dearer than his own. And it touched him deeply to see, as she listened to his story, how utterly her own sorrow was merged into her grief for *him;* her misery at all he suffered in his cruel bondage; her loathing at the thought of all he had borne for those long years, in even nominal connexion with such as his wife was. It touched him deeply to see how her own wrongs faded away unremembered in her grief for him, and she was more dear, more dangerous to him in that hour of suffering, than in her gayest, sweetest, or most bewitching moments.

Wrapt in that silent communion, absorbed in the bitterness in which the first hours of their reunion were steeped, neither heard a footfall on the forest turf, nor saw the presence of one, who, drawing near them, looked on the completion of that vengeance which had struck its first blow so many years before, and now came to deal its last. They neither saw nor heard her, till her chill, coarse, harsh tones stirred the sweet, soft air.

"Miss Tressillian, two years ago you chose to disbelieve, or feign to disbelieve, my claims upon your lover. Ask

Major De Vigne now, in my presence, if he can dare to deny that I am his lawful and wedded wife?"

With a cry of horror, Alma looked up. With a fierce oath he sprang to his feet, standing at last face to face, as he had stood at the marriage-altar with the woman whom the Church and Law had made his wife. Thus they met at last in the silent aisles of the forest; thus they met at last, those two fierce foes whom the marriage-laws assumed to hold as "two whom God had joined together!" And she stood looking at him with a cruel laugh, a leering triumph in her eyes, a devilish sneer upon her lip, hating him still with a chill and ceaseless hate; while he gazed down upon her as men gazed upon the loathsome and accursed sight of the Lamia, while between them, clinging to his arm in terror, as if to shield him from the hatred of his deadliest enemy, was the woman he loved. On the one hand, the vile mistress who had cursed his life; on the other, the better angel, which had nestled in his heart to touch all its deeper chords, and waken all its purer love.

The Trefusis looked at him, and smiled; a smile that chilled his blood as the cold gleam of a dagger in the moonlight, chills the blood of a man, waking from sweet dreams to find himself fettered and bound in the clutches of his must cruel foe.

"Ask him, Miss Tressillian!" she said again. "You disbelieved me. See if Granville De Vigne, who in bygone days used to boast very grandly of his truth and honour, dare tell you a lie before my face, and say that I am *not* his Wife."

Cold, swift, and haughty, rushed the words to Alma's lips, with the scorn and fire latent in her Southern nature.

"He would not lower himself so far to your level, as even to conceal the truth. I know all!—and if the sorrow be his, the shame of his marriage rests solely upon you."

She laughed, that coarse, harsh laugh which, with many other of the traces of her origin and her innate vulgarity, had crept out since, her aim attained, she had flung off that uncongenial gloss and varnish of refinement which she had assumed to lure her prey.

"You take the high hand, young lady! Well, you are wise to make the most of a bad bargain; and since you cannot be his wife, to pretend it is the more honourable

post to be his mistress! I wish you joy; his love has ever been so very famous for its constancy!"

"Woman! silence!" broke in De Vigne, and even the Trefusis paused for the moment, and shrank from the lurid fire flashing from his eyes, the dark wrath gathered in his face. "Dare to breathe another of your brutal insults in her ear, and I swear your sex shall not shield you from my vengeance. You have wronged *me* enough. Your ribald jests shall never soil her purity! My love, my darling!" he whispered passionately, bowing his head over Alma, who still clung unconsciously to his arm, her colour changing, her face full of horror, terror, loathing, at the first coarse words that had ever been spoken to her—that had ever breathed to her of shame! "do not heed her; do not listen to her. She is a bold, bad woman. O God, forgive me! that I should have brought you to this!"

"Purity!" re-echoed the Trefusis, with her cold loud laugh. "Since when has that new idol had any attraction for you? In bygone days if the external pleased your senses, I never knew you cared for over-cleanliness of mind and character! How long have you begun to learn platonics? The rôle will hardly suit you long, I fancy. If this pretty child likes to be added to the string of your cast-off loves, it is no concern of mine, though you *are* my husband."

His face grew white as death; he forced to stand by and hear what he worshipped, insulted thus! With a fierce gesture, forgetful of her sex, he would have struck her in his wrath, his grief, his insulted pride, his maddened anguish; but Alma caught his arm:

"*For my sake—*"

The low words, the touch of her hand, the sight of her upraised face, stood between him and his passion as no other thing on earth would have done. For "her sake" his arm dropped. The dark blood surged over his brow; and he put his hand upon his breast, as he had done at the marriage-altar, to keep down the storm of passions raging in his heart.

"Out of my sight, out of my sight," he muttered in his teeth, "or by God I shall do what you will wish to your dying day undone!"

Something in the grand wrath of this tempestuous and

fiery nature awed and stilled even her; a dogged sullenness overspread her face; she was foiled and mastered, and for the first time her revenge was wrested from her grasp. She could not turn what he now loved from him.

At that minute light laughter, lighter footsteps, low, gay voices, broke on their ear, and through the beech-boughs of the Gros Fouteau came Madame de La Vieillecour and her party. The Duchess recognised De Vigne with surprise; she saw, moreover, that they arrived at an untimely season on a painful scene; but coming forward with her hands outstretched, she welcomed him home with pleasant fluent words of congratulation.

It was well for him that he had learnt, long years before, the first lesson society gives its pupils; to smile when their hearts are breaking, to wear a tranquil, unmoved air while the vultures gnaw at their life-strings; or he could hardly have answered the new-comers, while the stormy passions just aroused in all their fullest strength, raged and warred in his heart; while on the one side stood the woman he loved, on the other the wife he loathed!

"Come back to dine with us," continued Madame de La Vieillecour; "the carriages are waiting. Alma, ma belle, you look ill; you are tired, and the sun has been too hot."

She turned away with her gay party, talking to De Vigne, who instinctively followed, when suddenly on his ear the clear, cold, hard tones of the Trefusis (at whom, since his last words, he had not glanced, and whom Madame de La Vieillecour had not observed in the twilight of the forest, which was growing dark, now that the sun had set) hissed through the air, arresting all:

"Granville, may I trouble you for a few words before you leave? I thought it was not usual for a husband to accept an invitation before his wife's face, in which she was not included!"

The Duchess turned quickly; the harsh and rapid English was lost on the rest of the party, but she, despite all her tact and high breeding, stared, first at the speaker, then at De Vigne.

"*Mais!—quelle est donc cette femme?*"

He did not hear her; he had swung round, his face, even to his lips, white with passion. Careless of all observers, Alma clasped both hands upon his arm:

"Do not go," she whispered. "Come with me. Do not stay with her, if you love me!"

For once he was deaf to her prayer; his lips quivered in torture—to have that woman, bold, bad, low, hateful, all he knew her to be, stand there and claim him as her husband! "A few words with me!" he muttered deliriously. "Yes; we will have a few more words! By Heaven, they shall be such as you will remember to your grave."

Alma clung to his arm, breathless, trembling blanched with fear. "If you love me, do not stay! She will madden you, she will goad you to some crime! leave her to do her worst. She is beneath your vengeance!"

For the first time he was deaf to her entreaties—for the first time he would not listen to her voice. He put her hands off his arm, and answered her in the same low tone:

"I will rejoin you. Fear nothing from me: in all I do and say while my life lasts, I shall remember *you*. Go!"

He spoke gently, but too firmly for her to resist him, and turned to the Duchess.

"Allow me, Madame, to speak a few words with this person? I will rejoin you. You do not dine till nine?"

"No. I will leave horses for you at the entrance of the Gros Fouteau—au revoir!"

Certain indistinct memories arose in the Duchess's mind of a story her brother, little Curly, had told her, long ago, of some unhappy and ill-assorted marriage which De Vigne had made; and she rapidly guessed all the truth. They went; a turn hid them from sight, and De Vigne was alone with his wife, in the twilight deepening around them. For a moment neither spoke. Perhaps the memory was too strong in both of twelve years before, when they had stood thus, face to face, before the marriage-altar, to take the marriage-vows—on one side a lie and a fraud, on the other a curse life-long and inexorable.

Alma knew him aright—this woman maddened him. She had set light to all the hottest passions in him, and they now flared and raged far beyond power of his to still them. His loathing for one who only bore his name to dishonour it, and only used the tie of wife to torture and insult him, overmastered reason and self-control, and unloosed the bonds of all that was darker and most dangerous in his character.

She looked at him and laughed, with that coarse sneer which had been on her lips when she signed her name in the chapel at Vigne.

"So! Granville De Vigne, we have met at last! You have found my promised revenge no child's play, no absurd bombast, as you fancied it, eh? You are my husband, *my husband* 'until death us shall part.' Do you remember the sweet words of the marriage service that bound us together for life? I have driven you from your home; I have made the memory of your mother weigh on you with the weight of murder; I have cheapened your name to the world and made it hateful to you; I stand a bar, as long as you and I shall live, to your peace and happiness. You laughed once when I vowed to be revenged on you; you can hardly laugh at it now!"

"Silence! fiend incarnate!" burst from De Vigne, the mad agony in him breaking bounds. "Oh! wretch, divorced in truth, from the day we stood together at the altar, evil enough I have done to God and man, but not enough to be cursed with you." . . . .

She laughed again—that coarse and brutal laugh which thrilled through his every nerve.

"No doubt you hate me hotly enough! You want your freedom, De Vigne. You want to wash off the stain from your name. You want to go back to your lordly home without my memory poisoning the air. You want your liberty, if only on the old plea for which you used to want all things that were not easy to get, because it is unattainable. Of course you hate me! Perhaps that gold-haired child whom I found you weeping over so pathetically, finding mere love an unprofitable connexion, wants to work on you to put your freedom in *her* hands, and you would fain be quit of me, to pay down the same price again for a new passion—"

With a fierce spring De Vigne seized her in his grasp, crushing her as in an iron vice.

"Dare to say one word of her again, and I shall forget your sex! Let her alone, I tell you, or by Heaven it may be worse for you than you ever dream!"

She quailed before the passion in his voice, the strength of the grip in which he held her. But her fiendish delight in goading him to fury outweighed her fear. She laughed again:

"Sullied! polluted! I fancy your protection will do that more completely than my pity, especially when you select for your inamorata one of Vane Castleton's forsaken loves!"

An oath so fierce that it startled even her, stopped her in her jeering slander. The boiling oil was flung upon the seething flames, lashing them into fury. He was stung past all endurance, and the insult to the woman whom he knew as stainless as the virgin snow, goaded him to insanity; he neither knew nor cared in that moment what he did; the blood surged over his brain, and flamed in his veins like molten fire; he gripped her in his grasp as a tiger his prey.

"Woman, silence! Would to God you were of my sex, that I could wreak such vengeance on you as you should carry to the grave."

Her fierce and cruel eyes laughed into his in the dull gray twilight, with leering triumph over the misery she caused.

"It is a pity there are laws as inexorable on murder as on marriage! You would not be the first husband who killed his wife when he fell in love with another woman—"

She stopped, stricken with sudden awe and fear, at the passion she had stung, and tortured, into being. As the iron gripe of his hands clenched harder and harder upon her, for the first time it flashed upon her that she was *in his power*—the power of the man she had so bitterly wronged, and whom she had now goaded on to reckless fury and despair! She knew his fiery passions—she knew his lion-like strength—she knew his long and unavenged wrongs; and she trembled, and shivered, and turned pale in his relentless grasp, for she was in his hands, and had aroused a tempest she knew not how to allay.

"Wretch, accursed! if you tempt me to wash out my wrongs, and slay you where you stand, your blood will be on your own head!"

His voice, as it hissed out in the horrible whisper, sounded strange even to his own ear, his brain thrilled and throbbed, flashes of fire danced before his eyes, through which he saw, cruel and hateful, the face of his temptress—of his wife! The pale heavens whirled around him, the

giant forms of the forest trees seemed dark and ghastly shapes. His grasp tightened and tightened on her; she had no strength against him; her life was in his power, that life which only existed to do him hideous wrong; that life which stood an eternal bar between him and love, and peace, and honour; that one human life which stood barring him out from all he coveted, and which in one flash of time he could snap, and still, and destroy for ever from his path, which its presence so long had cursed.

They were alone, shrouded and sheltered in the solitude of the coming night; in that dense forest, there were no eyes to see, no ears to listen, no voices to whisper whatever might be done under the cover of those silent beechwood shades.

That horrible hour of temptation!—coming on him when, with every passion stung to madness, his blood glowed ready to receive the poison! The night was still around them, there was not a sound save the sigh of the leaves; not a thing to look upon them, save the little crescent moon and the stars, which were arising slowly one by one. Night and Solitude—twin tempters—gathered round him; his heart stood still, his brain was on fire, his eyes blind and dizzy; alone, out of the gray and whirling haze around him he saw her mocking, fiendish gaze, and the voice of a fell Temptation whispered in his ear, "Her life is in your hands, revenge yourself. Wash out the stain upon your name, win back the liberty you crave, efface the loathsome insults on the woman you love. She stands between you and the heaven you crave—take the life that destroys your own. For your love she gave you fraud; for your trust, betrayal; for your name, disgrace. Avenge it! Is it not just? One blow, never heard, and never known by any mortal thing, and you have freedom back, and love!"

His brain reeled; his grasp tightened and tightened upon her, too strong for her to have power or movement left The night whirled around him, the pale blue skies grew crimson as with blood, the great gnarled trunks of the trees seemed to mock and grin like horrid spirits, goading him to evil, his passions surged in madness through his veins; and clear and ghastly he seemed to hear a tempter's voice "Avenge your wrongs, and you are free!"

With a cry to God, a throe of agony, he flung the fell

allurement from him, and threw her from his grasp. "Devil, temptress! thank your God, not me, I have not murdered you to-night!" She lay where he had thrown her, stunned, less by the fall than by the terror of the moment past—that moment of temptation which had seemed eternity to both. She lay there motionless, and he fled from her—fled as men flee from death or capture—fled from that crime which had lured him so nearly to its deadly brink; which so nearly had cursed and haunted his life with the relentless terror, the hideous weight, of a human life, silenced and shattered by his hand, lain by his deed in its grave, sent by his will from its rightful place and presence in the living, laughing earth, into the dark and deadly mysteries of the tomb.

He fled from the hideous temptation which had assailed him in that hour of madness—he fled from the devil of Opportunity to which so many sins are due, and from whose absence so many virtues date: flinging it away from him with a firm hand, not daring to stay to test his strength by pausing in its presence. He fled on and on, in the twilight gloom, through the trembling leaves, and evening shadows; he fled on under the gaunt bows and tangled aisles of the woodland; dark passions warring and rioting within him. Dizzy with the whirling of his brain, every nerve strung to tension, and quivering and throbbing with the fierce torture of the ordeal past, he sank down at last as one whom the bloodhounds have chased, half conscious, on the cool fresh turf, with a cry of agony and thanksgiving: "My God! my God! I thank thee that my hands are stainless from this sin!"

The silver scimetar of the young moon rose over the forest, the twilight deepened, and the night came down on Fontainebleau, veiling town and woodland, lake and palace, in its soft and hallowing light; still he lay there, exhausted with the conflict, worn out with that fell struggle with temptation, where submission had been so easy, victory so hard. And as the twilight shadows deepened round him, and the dews gathered thicker, and the numberless soft voices of the night chimed through the silent forest glades, he thanked God that his heart was free, his hands stainless, from the guilt, which, if never known by his fellow-men, would yet have haunted him with its horrible presence throughout his life, poisoned the purest air he breathed,

turned the fairest heaven that smiled on him into a hell, waked him from his sweetest sleep to start and shudder at the chill touch of remembered crime, and cursed his dying bed with a horror that would have pursued him to the very borders of his grave. He thanked God that for once in his life he had resisted the mad temptation of the hour, and thrust away the evil Thought ere it had had time to fester into Deed; he thanked God that the dead weight of a human life was not upon his soul, to rise and drive him, Orestes-like, from every haven of rest, to damn him in his softest hours of joy, to make him shrink from the light of heaven, and tremble at the rustle of the trees, and quail before the innocent and holy beauty of the earth crimsoned with his guilt. He thanked God that he could meet the innocent eyes of the woman he loved without a secret on his soul; that he could take her hands without staining them with the guilt on his; that he could hold her to his heart, without the deadly presence of that crime between them with which, to win her, he would have darkened earth, and burdened both their lives. He thanked God that he could stand there in the solemn aisles of the Forest and feel the wind fan his hair, and hear the sighing of the woodland boughs, and look upwards to the holy stillness of the skies without the myriad voices of the Earth and Heaven calling on him to answer for his guilt—that he could stand there under the fair evening stars, stainless from the guilt which had tempted him in the darkest hour of his life, able to look up with a clear brow, and a fearless conscience, into the pure eyes of night!

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### TRIED IN THE FIRE AND PROVEN.

It is strange how the outer world surrounds yet never touches the inner, how the gay and lighter threads of life intervene yet never mingle with those that are darkest and sternest, as the parasite clings to the forest tree, united yet ever dissimilar! From the twilight gloom of the silent forest, from solitude and temptation and suffering, De Vigne passed suddenly into the glitter and glow and bril-

liance, the light laughter and ringing jests, and the peopled salons of the Diaman du Forêt. From the dense woods and the stirless silence of the night, only haunted by the presence of the woman who had cursed his life, and well-nigh lured him to irrevocable and ineffaceable guilt, he came by abrupt transition into a gay and brilliant society, from which all sombre shadows were banished, and where its groups, laughing, jesting, flirting, carrying on the light intrigues of the hour, seemed for the time as though no sorrow or suffering, bitterness or passion, had ever intruded amongst them. Strange contrast! those glittering salons, and that dark and deadly solitude of the beech woods of the Gros Fouteau—not stranger than the contrast between the face which had lured him to crime and misery, in the dense shadow of the forest gloom, and the one on which he looked as, when away from the gaiety and the gossip, the light laughter and the subdued murmur of society, he drew her, after awhile, unnoticed, out on to the terrace which overlooked the wooded and stately gardens of the Diaman du Forêt, where the moonbeams slept on lawn and lake, avenue and statue, in the calm May night, that shrouded Fontainebleau, town and palace and forest, in its silvery mist.

Neither of them spoke; neither could have found voice to utter all that arose in their hearts at the touch of each other's hand, the gaze of each other's eyes, the sense of each other's presence.

Dark and heavy upon them was the weight of that past hour. Silent they stood together in the solitude of the night that was calm, hushed and peaceful, fit for a love either more tranquil, or more fully blessed, than theirs.

His voice was hoarse and broken as he spoke at last, bowing his head over her:

"I have sinned before Heaven and before thee. I have fallen very low!"

She did not answer him, she only lifted her eyes to his. By the silvery gleam of the night he could see the unswerving fidelity, after all, through all, promised him for all eternity while her heart should beat, and her eyes have life to gaze upon his face.

Now he knew, never again to doubt it, how unwearyingly, and how entirely, this imperishable and unselfish love which

he had won, would cling around him to his dying day. The night was still, not a murmur stirred among the trees, not a breath moved upon the surface of the little lake, not a cloud swept across the pale pure stars, gleaming beyond in the blue heavens. The earth was hushed in deep repose, nature slept the solemn and tranquil sleep which no fret and wrath of man has power to weaken or arrest; while he, the mortal, with human love trembling on his lips, and human suffering quivering in his heart, told in broken earnest words the confession of that dire temptation which so nearly had ripened into crime. He laid his heart bare to her, with all its sins and weaknesses, its errors and its impulses, knowing that his trust was sacred, secure of sympathy, and tenderness, and pity. He spoke to her as men can never speak to men, as they can seldom speak to women. He told her of that darker nature born in him, as more or less in all, which had slumbered unknown, till opportunity awoke it; and which then aroused in all its force, had wrestled with all that was merciful, gentle, and better within him. He told her of that fell Tempter of Thought which had arisen so suddenly in night and solitude, and whispered him to a deed that would give him back his freedom, avenge his wrongs, and shatter the fetters that weighed him down with their unmerited burden. He told her how he had fled from it, how he had conquered it, how he had escaped with pure hands and stainless soul, to render thanks to God for his deliverance, in the solemn forest-aisles of that temple, where man best meets the mystery of deity; which human hands never fashioned, and human creeds, and follies, and priestcraft cannot enter to lower and pollute.

He told her, laying bare to her all the deadly crime begotten in his heart, and so well-nigh wrought by his hand into the black guilt with which one human life stifles and tramples out another; then he asked her:

"Can you love me—after this?"

She lifted up her face, that was white as death where the light of the moon shone upon it; and her voice was low and tremulous, yet sustained with the great heroic tenderness which did not shrink from him in his sin, which did not recoil from him in his fell temptation, but which forgot and washed its own wrong in the deep waters of an exhaustless love

"I shall love you while I have life! I have said it; I can say no more. Let the world condemn you—you are the dearer to *me!*"

He crushed her closer in his arms.

"Great Heaven! Such love as yours binds us with stronger force, and consecrates holier tie, than any priest-craft can ever forge. *She* is *not* my wife. Reason, right, sense, justice, all divorced her from the very hour I left her at the altar, my bitter enemy, my relentless foe, who won me by deceit, who would have made my life a hell, who renders me a devil, not a man! *She* my wife! Great God, I renounce her!"

Alma, as the fierce words were muttered in his throat, clung to him, her voice low and dreamy, like the voice of one in feverish pain.

"She is no wife of yours; a woman that could hate you and betray you! A woman whom you left at the altar! How can they bind you to her?"

"They may!—*I* care not, save that she holds the name that should be yours. This was all that was wanting to fill up the measure of my hate for her. Let fools go babble of her claims upon me if they will! From the hour we parted at the altar I never saw her face till this night; from this night I divorce her before God. She is no wife of mine; her rights are mere legal quibbles, love never forged, fidelity never sanctified, God never blessed them! I claim my heritage of justice as a man—my right to live, to love, to taste the common happiness of my fellows. The very birds around us find their mates! Why are we, alone of all the earth, to be wrenched apart, and condemned to live and die asunder? Why are we, alone, to be forced to surrender all that makes life of joy and value? Alma!—surely we love well enough to defy the world together?"

He paused abruptly, his frame shook with the great passions in him, which were stronger than his strength; the words broke from him unawares—the words that would decide their fate! her face was flushed to a deep scarlet glow as he looked down on it by the silvery light of the moon, her hands closed tighter upon his, her lips quivered, and he felt her slight, delicate form tremble in his arms. She clung closer to him still, her breathing hurried and low, like broken, rapid sighs; her eyes, humid and dark as

night, fell beneath his; that one word "together," stirred the depths of her heart, as the storm-winds the depths of the sea. Two years before, she would have scarce comprehended the extent of the sacrifice asked of her, more than Mignon or Haidee; scarce known more fully than they, all it called on her to surrender. Now she knew its meaning; knew that this man, who was thus pitilessly cursed for no crime, nor error, but simply for a *mistake*—the fatal and irrevocable mistake of early marriage—would be condemned by the world if he took his just heritage of freedom. She knew that, for a divine compassion, an imperishable love, she, who clung to him, would be laid by social law beneath a social ban, would be forbid by it from every sphere and every honour that were her due by birth, by intellect, by right. She knew her sacrifice. She knew that she should decide the destiny of her whole future; and the proud nature, though strong enough to defy both, was one to abhor any free glance, to resent every scornful word; the haughty and delicate spirit was one to feel keenly, yielding one inch of her just place. But—she loved; and the world was far from her; she loved, and her life lay in his. Fidelity is the marriage-bond of God: the laws of man cannot command it, the laws of man are void without it. Would she not render it unto him, even to her grave? Would she not be his wife in the sight of Heaven? Suffering for him would be proudly borne, sacrifice to him would be gladly given. She would have followed him to the darkness of the tomb; she would have passed with him through the furnace of the fires; content, always content, so that her hands were closed on his, so that she had strength to look up to his face.

This is sin, say you? Verily, if it be so, it is the sublimest sin that ever outshone virtue!

He bent his head lower and lower, and his words were hoarse and few.

"Can you love me—enough for this?"

He felt a shudder as of icy cold run through her frame as she lay folded in his embrace. By the white light of the moon, he saw the scarlet blush upon her face waver, and burn, and deepen; quick, tremulous sighs heaved her heart; her arms wreathed and twined closer and closer about him; her eyes gleamed with an undying and eternal

love, as they met his own, in the pale soft radiance of the stars:

"You are my world, my all! Your will is mine!"

The words were spoken that would give her to him.

The whisper died away, scarce stirring the air; the fevered flush upon her face glowed warm, then changed to a marble whiteness. She clung to him closer still; and passionate tears, born from the strong emotions of the hour, welled slowly up, and fell from those eyes which she had first lifted to his when she was a little child, flinging flowers at him in the old library at Weivehurst. She loved him, she pitied him; she would forsake all to give him back that happiness of which another's fraud had robbed him. She thought of nothing then save him; and if he had stretched out his hand and bade her follow him into the dark, cold shadows of the grave, she would have gone with him fondly, fearlessly, unselfishly, still thinking only of him; what comfort she could give, what trial share, what pain avert. She loved him. She was tried in the fire, and proven. The world, I say, was very far from Alma then—as far as the fret, and noise, and bustle of the city streets are from the fair and solemn stars of heaven.

And in the stillness of the night their lips met. She would give up the world for him.

* * * * * *

He parted from the woman he loved, upon the terrace that night, under the starry summer skies; he could not return to the crowded salon within; he could not join again the glitter and gaiety of French society; and he took his way across the park towards the little village of Chailly, to rest there for the few short hours which remained before sunrise.

It was now midnight; all was still as the silence of the grave about him, while he went across the great stretches of sward under the trees, with only the hoot of a night bird in his ear, or the stealing of a fox among the brushwoods breaking the deep tranquillity. The awe of that great guilt, which so near had been his, was still upon him; the weight of his erring past hung on him; his heart was sad and heavy, and the fruit of his own bygone madness was bitter in his teeth. His pride was bent; his iron will broken; his deep passions chastened; a chasm of crime had yawned

at his feet, to leave him a humbler and a gentler man. And the bitterness of a yearning and futile remorse, a remorse which made him loathe himself, a remorse which gnawed and seared his heart like scorching fire, was on him, as he remembered across the far stretch of misspent years, his mother's prophecy:

"You will love again; to find the crowning sorrow of your life, or drag another in to share your curse!"

Like the blow of a knife into open, bleeding wounds, struck a few coarse laughing words whispered in his ear, as he paced through the dense woodland in the shadows and the stillness of the midnight hour:

"Do you love your wife any dearer to-night, sir; or are you thinking what a cursed mistake you made a dozen years ago?"

He swung round, starting like a thoro'bred under the galling and the rending of the spur; in the moonlight solitude the words sounded like the hissing gibe of demons, mocking in his ear, and jabbering at his bondage. Close behind him, in the dim light, he saw his ex-valet, Raymond, with a laugh upon his face, as the moon shone full on it.

Stung past endurance by the impudent leer of this cur who dogged his steps even in solitude; maddened at the words which made a brutal jest of the deadly curse upon his life, De Vigne, by sheer instinct, and without thought or pause, seized him by his throat, and flung him away from him, as men fling a dog out of their path.

"Hound! learn how I bear with insolence!"

The man fell with a heavy crash among the brushwood; but the ferns and gorse of the thick undergrowth tempered his fall, and with a muttered oath he gathered himself slowly up, and sprang with a light bound after De Vigne:

"Sir! sir, listen! Don't be so hasty, Major. I mean you no insult, before God I don't. I can do for you what nobody else can!" . . . . .

De Vigne motioned him aside:

"Out of my way, or I shall do you a mischief!"

But the man was undaunted, and ran beside him, to keep pace with his swift strides, panting, breathless, eager:

"Do hear me, sir, do. By Heaven, sir, I can free you from your wife!"

At the words, spoken in such an hour, De Vigne staggered

as if a shot had struck him, and reeled backward against the tall moss-grown fence which ran along the borders of the park. In the gray moonlight the man Raymond saw the dark blood that stained his face, then faded, leaving it an ashy pallor, and the gesture with which his hand went to his heart, like one under the heavy suffocation of asphyxia:

"*Free! Free!* O God!"

His voice rattled incoherently in his throat, he paused for breath, he looked up to the starlit skies with a wild appealing stare, the earth reeled round him, his eyes swam, he wondered whether this were delirium or dream.

The man was awed and frightened at his look; and came, up to him and shook him by the arm:

"Sir, sir, for Heaven's sake don't look like that! It's *truth* I'm telling you. She's not your wife, sir!" . . .

De Vigne's eyes turned on him with a mute, imploring, unconscious prayer; his lips quivered, his veins swelled, his voice shook, hoarse, stifled, inarticulate: the agony of joy unnerves us more than the agony of death!

"Not my wife! *Not!* Good God! you are not brute enough to lie—to hoax—"

The words died in his throat, and the man looked up at him steadily and fearlessly in the light slanting in through the boughs.

"'Fore George, sir, no. I wouldn't be such a blackguard!" he said heartily. "It ain't no lie! I can do for you what no divorce laws can, thanks to the timorous fools that frame them. If those gentlemen were all fettered themselves, they'd make the gate go a little easier to open! I *can* set you free, but how I won't tell you till we come a little to terms."

Free! Not to Bonnevard, pining in the darkness and wretchedness of Chillon, was freedom what it was to him. Free! The very thought maddened him with eager, impatient, breathless thirst for *certainty*. He seized the man by the shoulders in his iron grip:

"Great Heaven! Tell me all—all; do you hear?—all!"

"Gently, gently, Major," said Raymond, wincing under his grasp, "or I shall have no breath to tell you anything. I can set you free, sir: and I don't wonder you wish to be

rid of her! But before I tell you how, you must tell me if you will give me the proper price for information."

De Vigne shook him like a little dog.

"Cur! Do you think I will make a compact with such as *you?* Out with all you know, and I will reward you afterwards: out with it, or it will be the worse for you!"

"But Major," persisted the man, halting for breath, "if I tell you all first, what gage have I that you will not act on my information, and never give me a farthing?"

"My word!" gasped De Vigne, hurling the answer down his throat. "It is bond enough! Speak; do you hear Is she not my wife?"

"No, sir! because!—she was mine first!"

"*Yours?* Then—"

"Your marriage is null and void, sir."

As the words of his release were uttered in the hushed stillness of the midnight woodlands, De Vigne staggered against the fence, dizzy and blind as in delirium. Free! Free!—his name once more his own, purified from the taint of her claim upon it; free!—his home once more his own, purged from the dark and haunting memories of an irremediable past; free!—from the bitterness of his own folly, so long repented of in agony and solitude; free!—to recompense with honour in the sight of men, the love which would have given up all for his sake, and followed him, content, to any fate.

Breathless with his new-born hope, he leaned there in the solitude of the night, forgetful of Raymond's presence, seeing, hearing, heeding nothing, save that one word—*free!* the blood flowing with fever-heat through all his veins, every nerve throbbing with the electric shock, his whole frame trembling with voiceless thanksgiving.

He covered his eyes with his hand, like a man dazzled with the sudden radiance of a noontide sun.

"Will you swear that?"

"Aye, sir, on the Bible, and before all the courts and judges in the land, if you like."

De Vigne gave one quick, deep sigh, flinging off from him for ever the iron burden of many years:

"Tell me all, quick, from beginning to end, and give me all your proofs."

He spoke with the eager, wayward, restless impatience

of his boyhood; the old light gleamed in his eyes, the old music rang in his voice. The chains were struck off; he was free!

"Very well, sir. I must make a long story of it. Nineteen years ago, sir, Lucy Davis was a very dashing-looking girl—as you thought, Major, at that time—and I was twenty-two, and much more easily taken in than I was when I had seen a little more of human nature. My name was Trefusis, sir, not Raymond at all. I took an *alias* when I entered your service. My father was a Newmarket leg, and he made a good lot of money one way and another; and he had more gentlemen in his power, and more of your peerage swells, sir, under his dirty old thumb, knowing all that he knew, and having done for 'em all that he had done, than you'd believe if I was to swear it to you. He wanted to make a gentleman of me. 'Charlie, my boy,' he used to say, 'with brains and tin you may be as good as them swells any day; they hain't no sort of business to look down on you. I've done dirty work enough to serve them, I reckon.' He wanted to make a gentleman of me, and he gave me a capital education, and more money and fine clothes than any boy in the school. He went to glory when I was about eighteen, sir, leaving me all his tin to do just whatever I liked with, and not a soul to say me nay. I soon spent it, sir; every stiver was gone in no time. I bought horses, and jewellery, and wine. I betted, I played; in short, I made ducks and drakes of it in a very few years with a lot of idle young dogs like myself. Jimmy Jarvis—you will have heard of him, sir?—was going to have a mill with the Brownlow boy, at Greystone Green, and I went down with two or three others to see the fight. While I was in Frestonhills, sir, I saw Lucy Davis in the milliner's shop in High Street, and I fell straight in love with her for her great black eyes and her bright carnation colour. I went to church to see her the next day, and bowed to her; and so we got acquainted, sir, and I fell more and more in love, and I wouldn't have stirred from Frestonhills just then to have made my fortune. That was a year after you had left, sir. But I knew nothing of *your* affair, sir, then—trust her!

"Well! I was in love with Lucy, and she thought me a man of fashion and of fortune, and married me; the register

is in the church of Frestonhills, you can see it, sir, any day you like. In six months I thought myself a great fool for having fettered myself. Lucy's temper was horrid;—always had been—and when she found out that all my riches would soon make themselves wings and flee away, it was not softened much. She helped me to spend my money, sir, for twelve months, leading me about as wretched a life as any woman could lead a man. We lived chiefly abroad, sir, at the German Baths; then the tin was all gone, and Lucy grew a very virago; as she had taken me only out of ambition, it was a hard cut to her, I dare say, to find me a mere nobody. We parted by mutual consent; I left her at Wiesbaden, and went my own ways; she had spent every shilling I had. Some time after I was fool enough to forge a cheque; it was found out, and they shipped me off to the colonies, and Lucy was free of me. Some years after, I learnt what she did with herself; at Wiesbaden old Lady Fantyre was staying, rouging, gambling, and living by her wits, as you know she always has done, sir, ever since anybody can remember her. She saw Lucy at the Kursaal, and Lucy had improved wonderfully in twelve months: she could get up a smattering of things very fast; she could dress well on little or nothing; she had quick wits, and a haughty, defiant, knock-me-down manner that concealed all her ignorance, and carried everything before her. Old Fantyre took a fancy to her; she wanted to have a companion, somebody to make her up well for the evenings, and read her novels to her, and humour her caprices, and amuse the young fellows while she fleeced them at écarté or vingt-et-un. Lucy seemed just fit for her place. She didn't know she was married; Lucy made herself out an unprotected girl, whom you, sir, had deserted, and old Fantyre took her into her service. Now, Lucy was uncommonly clever, hard-hearted, and sharp-sighted; she humoured the old woman, she made herself necessary to her, she chimed in with all her sayings, she listened to all her stories, she got into her good graces, and made her do pretty well what she chose. You remember, sir, perhaps, that when you and Lucy parted at Frestonhills she told you she'd be revenged on you. She isn't a woman to *forget*. She told Lady Fantyre about you, and she induced her to think that if she could catch you and marry you, what a capital thing it would be

for both of them, and how royally they could help you to spend your fortune.

"I must tell you, Lucy had heard that the government ship that had taken me out to Botany Bay had foundered, and she didn't know that I and a few others had managed to drift in the jolly-boat till an American cruiser picked us up. She thought I was drowned, or else she would have been too wide awake to go in for bigamy. Clever women don't do that foolery out of novels! Old Fantyre listened, agreed, and took her to England, and introduced her as her niece. There, as you know, sir, you met her, and fell into her toils again. I don't wonder you did not know her. Years and society and dress, and the education she'd given herself, made such a difference. Four years after you had married her, I came to Europe, and went as valet to the Duc de Vermuth. I often wondered what had become of my wife; till one Sunday, when I went to the Pré Catalan, I saw a lady in a carriage, talking and laughing with a number of young fellows round her. She was a remarkably fine-looking woman, and something in her face struck me as like my wife. At that minute she saw me. She turned as white as her rouge would let her, gave a sort of scream, and stared at me. Perhaps she thought she saw my ghost. At any rate, she pulled the check-string, and drove away from me as fast as she could. Of course I didn't let her give me the slip like that. I followed her to a dashing hotel in the Champs Elysées, and just stepped up to her, and said, 'Well, old girl, how are you?' Horrible she looked—as if she longed to kill me—and, indeed, I dare say she did. She signed me not to blow on her, and said, 'Not now; come at eight this evening.' I went; and she told me all her story, and offered me, if I would keep quiet and tell nobody she was my wife, to go shares with me in the money you allowed her provided she lived out of England. I thought about it a little; I saw I should get nothing by proclaiming our marriage; I closed with her, and lived at my ease. But she grew screwy; she didn't pay up to time. She used to anticipate the money, and then defraud me of my share. At last it came into my head, when I heard you had come back from India, to see what sort of a gentleman you were, and whether you wanted your freedom bad enough to pay me a high price for it.

You required a valet. I entered your service; and when I was sent down to Richmond with the parrot and the books and the flowers, and so on, for that little lady—no, Major, don't stop me, I mean no offence to her—I thought the time would soon come, when you'd give *any* price for your freedom, for I heard plenty of talk, sir, at that time, about you and her; servants trouble themselves more about their master's business than they do about their own. The day you dismissed me from your service, I was going to tell you, if you had only listened. But you were so impatient and so haughty, that I thought I'd let you go on in ignorance, and free yourself, if ever you wanted, as best you might. I entered Lord Vane Castleton's service then. You know he was gone quite mad about Miss Tressillian. It seems, sir, he had been very good friends with Lucy in Paris, and he wrote and told her you were in love again, and with somebody who, he thought, didn't know you were married, and that if she wished to put a stop to it, she should come over and tell the young lady. Over she did come, saw him first, and then went to St. Crucis; and after she'd been—*I* didn't know she was in London—he sent me to bring Miss Tressillian to Windsor, while you were sitting in court-martial on Mr. Halkett. Mine was a dirty job, sir, I know, and a rascally one. Don't look at me so fiercely, Major, for God's sake! I am sorry I did it now, for she'd sweet blue eyes, that lady, and I was never quite easy till I knew she got out of Lord Vane's clutches. Then you went to the Crimea, and Lucy paid worse and worse. At last I thought I would try you again, if only to spite Lucy, who was living in splendour, and grudging me every shilling. I wrote to you at the Crimea—I tried to speak to you in the Rue Lafitte—finally, I tracked you here. Now I've told you all, Major. I know you well enough to know your word is as sure a bond as another man's cheque; and if you'll go with me, sir, to Trinity Church, Frestonhills, I'll show you the register of my marriage, which makes yours null and void."

And thus in the hush around, only broken by the sough of the wind, or the sweep of the night-bird, he heard the history which set him free. His arm was wound about the stem of a tree nigh, for he was dizzy, like a man after a mortal blow; he shaded his eyes with his hand: his lips

moved silently in voiceless prayer to God, and whispers to the woman whom he loved; his breathing came short and thick; his whole frame trembled like a woman's. The ecstasy of that hour! No criminal, condemned to death and suddenly reprieved, felt the warm rush of fresh air welcoming him as he issued—a free man—from the darkness of his prison-cell of doom, with more bewildering joy than he now felt; his liberty from the festering and bitter chains which so long had dragged upon him—his liberty from the weary weight, the repented folly, the bitter curse of Early Marriage.

He was silent, breathing fast and loud, struggling to realise his freedom from his bondage. Then—he threw back his head with a proud, joyous gesture; he looked up to the brilliant summer stars shining above his head; he drew in with a deep long breath the free sweet air that streamed around him. He turned his eyes upon the man, flashing with their old, shadowless light:

"Right! I would pay *any* price for freedom. Let us go to-night to England. I will not lose an hour—a moment!"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### FREED FROM BONDAGE.

FRESTONHILLS, unchanged, lay nestling among the green pastures and fresh woods of Berkshire, and all the old familiar places struck strangely on him as he passed them on the morrow. There flowed the silver Kennet, bright and rapid as of old, rushing on its swift sunny way past the wild luxuriant hedges; and through the quiet country towns and villages. There, on its banks, were schoolboys lying among the purple clover and under the fragrant hawthorns, as poor little Curly had done long years ago. There were the dark palings, and the forest-trees of Weivehurst, long changed to other hands before its rightful owner was laid to rest, his grave marked only by a simple wooden cross, under the southern skies of Lorave. There, against the blue heavens, rose above its woods the grey pinnacles of the old house where Alma Tressilian had made the roof ring with her childish laughter, playing under the golden

laburnums that flung the same shadows on the lawn, now, as then. There was the old Chancery, its gable roofs and its low ivy-grown walls; as he passed a lady glanced up, gardening among her geraniums and heliotropes—it was Miss Arabella—the ringlets very grey now! A little farther on, in the old playing-field, there were the wickets and the bats, and the jumping poles, and four or five boys, in their shirt sleeves and their straw hats, enjoying their half-holiday, as we had done before them. So life goes on; when one is bowled out, another is ready to step into his shoes, and no matter how many the ball of death may knock over, the cricket of life is kept up the same, and players are never wanting!

The register lay on the table, under the arched Norman window of the vestry of the church where, twenty years before, we had fidgeted through the dreary periods of the rector's cruel sermon full an hour long, and cast glances over our hymn-books at the pastrycook's pretty daughters.

The great old register, ponderous and dusty, lay on the table, the sunbeams from the stained glass above, falling on its leather binding and its thickly written leaves, full of so many records of man's joy and sorrow, crowded with so many names which now were empty sounds; penned by so many hands which were now crumbled to dust under the churchyard sods near by. The great register lay on its table in the dark, quiet, solitary vestry—the last he had seen was the one in which he had signed his doom, twelve years before, in the church at Vigne. The old sexton unlocked the book, and with shaking, infirm hand turned over the leaves one after the other. De Vigne leant against the table, watching for the entry, his breath short and laboured, his pulse beating, a mist before his eyes, a great agony of dread—the dread of *deception* tightening his heart, and oppressing him to suffocation. If the man's story were not true!—if this, too, were a hoax and a fraud! Breathless, trembling in every limb with fear and hope, he bent over the book, pushing the old man's hand away; his agony of impatience could not brook the slow and awkward fumbling of leaf after leaf, by the palsied feebleness of age. He thrust the pages back, one after another, till he reached the year 18—. Entry after entry met his eye from lords of the manor, their ancestral

names dashed across the page; from poor peasants, who could only make their mark; from feminine signatures, trembling and illegible; marriage after marriage met his eager glance, but not yet the one which has to loosen his fetters and set him free. He turned the leaves over, one after the other, his heart throbbing quick with wild hope and irrepressible fear. At last the setting sun, shining in through the rich hues, the rubies and the ambers, the heads of saints, and blazoned shields on the stained window above his head, flung radiant colours on one dim yellow sheet, illumining with its aureole of light the two signatures he sought—the words that gave him ransom—the names that struck off his chains:

CHARLES TREFUSIS.
LUCY DAVIS.

And as his eye fell upon the page which freed him from the wife who had so long cursed his life, and stained his honour, and made his name abhorrent in his sight because she bore it, De Vigne staggered forward, and, flinging the casement open, leant out into the calm, fresh evening, stunned by his sudden deliverance as by some mortal blow, and gasping for breath, while the warm westerly wind swept over him, like a man who has escaped from the lurid heat of fire into the pure, sweet air of a breaking dawn.

He was FREE! The life which he had so madly sought to spend like water, and fling off from him as an evil too bitter to be borne, among the jungles of Scinde and on the steppes of the Crimea, was once more rich, and precious, and beloved;—he learned at last what his wayward nature had been long ere it would believe, that the fate we deem a curse is oftentimes an angel in disguise, if we wait patiently for the unfolding of its wings from the darkness which enshrouds them.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### NEMESIS.

Two days after there was a fête given at Enghien, at the princely maison de plaisance of an English Earl—a stout, bloated old man, lavish as the wind, and rich as a Russian, who, consequently, had all the most seductive Parisiennes,

to make love to him; Dalilah caring very little who her Samson be, provided she can cut off his locks to her own advantage. The fête was of unusual magnificence, and the Empress of it was "the Trefusis," as we call her, "that poor fellow De Vigne's wife—a very fast lot, too," as men in general called her—"ma Reine," as the Earl of Morehampton called her, in that pleasant familiarity which she ever readily admitted to those good friends of hers, who emptied half the Palais Royal upon her in bijouterie, jewellery, and other innocent gifts of amity;—a familiarity that always stopped *just* short of the divorce court, over the water. The Trefusis reigned at Enghien, and remarkably well she looked in her sovereignty, her jewelled ivory parasol handle for her sceptre, and her handsome eyes for her *droit de conquête*. Only three nights before she had lain on the dank grass in the Royal Forest, where the mad agony of a man, whom she had goaded and taunted, had flung her off, bidding her thank God, not him, he had not murdered her in that ghastly temptation. Only three nights before! but to-day she sat under the limes at Enghien, the very memory of that hour cast behind her for evermore, save when she remembered how she had jeered, how she had triumphed—remembered in gloating glee, for her victim could not escape her snare. The Trefusis had rarely looked better—never felt more secure in her complete vengeance upon De Vigne, her omnipotent sway over Morehampton, and all her lordly clique, than now. She was beautifully rouged, the carnation tint rich and soft, and defying all detection; her black Chantilly lace sweeping around her superb form; a parure of amethysts glittering in her bosom as she drove down to the villa in the Earl's carriage, and reigned under the limes in dominance and triumph, as she had reigned since the day she had first looked at her own face in the mirror, and sworn by that face, to rise, and to revenge.

In brilliant style Morehampton had prepared to receive her, for he admired the quasi-milliner of Frestonhills more than anything else, for the time being, to the extreme rage of La Baronne de Bréloques, Mademoiselle Céleste Papillon, of the Français, and many other fair Parisiennes. There was the villa itself, luxurious as Eugène Sue's; and there were grounds with alcoves, and statues, and rosiers; there

was a "pavillon des arts," where some of the best cantatrici in Paris sang like nightingales; there was a déjeûner, with the best cookery in France—who can say more?—there were wines that would have made Rahab or Father Mathew swear, with Trimalchio, "Vita vinum est;" there were plenty of men, lions, littérateurs, and milords Anglais, who were not bored there, because they could say and do just what they pleased, with no restraint upon them whatever. And there were plenty of women (very handsome ones, too, for the Earl would never have wasted his invitations on plain faces), who smoked and laughed at *grivoises* tales, and drank the Johannisberg and the Steinberg very freely for such dainty lips, and imitated us with their *tranchant* manners, their slang, and their lionneism, in everything except their toilettes, which were exclusively feminine in their brilliance and voluminous extent.

The déjeûner was over, during which the noble Earl, as his friends in the Upper House termed him, when they were most politely damning him, was exceedingly devoted to the Trefusis, and thought he had never seen anything finer than those admirably-tinted eyes and beautifully-coloured cheeks. He did not care for your nymphs of eighteen, they were generally too shy and too thin for his taste; he liked *bien conservées*, full-blown, magnificent roses, like the ex-milliner. The déjeûner was over, at which the Trefusis had reigned with supreme contentment, laughed very loudly, and drank champagne enough for a young cornet just joined; at which old Fantyre had enjoyed the pâtés de foie gras and other delicacies, like an old *gourmette* as she was, told dirty stories in broad Irish-French, and chuckled in herself to see gouty old Morehampton playing the gallant: and at which Mademoiselle Papillon could have fainted with spite, but not willing to give the detested Englishwoman so enormous a triumph, resisted her feelings with noble heroism.

The déjeûner was over, and the guests had broken up into groups, dispersing themselves over the villa and its grounds. The Trefusis and Morehampton took themselves to the Pavillon des Arts; but, after hearing one song from the "Traviata," Ma Reine was bored—she cared nothing for music—and she threw herself down on a seat under some linden-trees to take ice, listen to his private band,

which was playing close by, and flatter him about his new barouche, which she knew would be offered her as soon as she had praised it. It was by such gifts as these she managed to eke out her income, and live *au premier* in the Champs Elysées. Morehampton flung himself on the grass at her feet, forgetful of gout and lumbago; other men gathered round her; she was "a deuced fine woman," they thought, but, "by George! they didn't envy De Vigne." The band played valses and Béranger airs; the Earl was diverted between admiration of the black eyes above, and rueful recollections of the damp turf beneath him; Mademoiselle Papillon made desperate love to Leslie Egerton, of the Queen's Bays, but never missed a word or a glance that went on under the lime-trees for all that, with that peculiar double set of optics and oral nerves with which women seem gifted. Very brilliant, and pleasant, and lively, and Watteau-like it all was; and, standing under an alcove at some little distance, mingling unnoticed with the crowd of domestics, stood Raymond, *alias* Charles Trefusis, come to claim his wife, as he had been bound to do on receipt of De Vigne's reward—none the less weighty a one, you may be sure, because the man had been given only a promise, and not a bond. De Vigne's honour in those matters was in exact inverse ratio to the world's.

"By Jove! sir," the fellow whispered to me—I had come with him to see he kept good faith, and did not give us the slip—"just look at her, what a dash she cuts, and what a fool she's making of that old lord! That's Lord Morehampton, ain't it, sir? I think I remember him in Pall Mall. I suppose Lucy's bewitched him. Isn't she a wonderful woman, sir? Who'd think, to see her now, that she was ever the daughter of a beggar-woman, and a little milliner girl at Frestonhills, making bonnets and dresses for parsons' wives!"

I looked at her as he spoke, and, though it seemed wonderful to him, it did not seem wonderful to me. Lucy Davis's rise was such a rise as Lucy Davis was certain to make, favoured by opportunity as she had been—neither more or less of a rise than a hard-headed, unscrupulous, excessively handsome woman, determined to push her way and able to take the best possible advantage of every turn of the wheel, was pretty sure to effect. She could not

make herself a gentlewoman—she could not make herself a woman of talent or of ton. She was merely what she had been for the last dozen years, with the aid of money, dress, and assurance—a dashing, handsome, skilful intrigante, whose magnificence of form made men forget her style, and whose fullblown beauty made them content with the paucity of ideas, and the vulgar harshness of tone, in the few words which ever passed her lips, which were too wise to essay often, that sure touchstone of mind and education—conversation.

Raymond stood looking at her, a cunning, malicious gleam of satisfaction in his little light eyes. His wife had made a better thing of life than he: he detested her accordingly: he had many old grudges to pay off against her for bitter, snarling words, and money flung to him, because she feared him, with a sneer, and an invective; he hated her for having lived in clover, while he had not even had a taste of luxury, save the luxuries of flunkeyism and valetdom, since they parted, and he enjoyed pulling her up in the midst of her glories with such malignant pleasure as was natural to his disposition. She had married him at two-and-twenty; she had made him repent of it before the honeymoon was out: she had played her cards since to her own glorification and his mortification; there was plenty in all that to give him no little enjoyment in throwing her back, with a jerk, in the midst of her race. He stood looking at her with a peculiar smile on his lips. I dare say he was thinking what a fool he had been to fall in love with the black-eyed milliner of Frestonhills, and what a far greater fool still was his lordship of Morehampton to waste so much time and so much money, such wines, such jewellery, and such adoration, on this full-blown rose, whom no one ever tried to gather but they impaled themselves upon her dexterously moss-hidden thorns.

At last the Trefusis, tired of ices, cancans, and Morehampton's florid compliments, rose to go into the house, and look at some Rose Du Berri vases that had belonged to Madame de Parabère; Morehampton sprung to his feet with boyish lightness and gallant disregard of the gout, and then—her husband stepped forward; and I doubt if Nemesis, though she often took a more imposing, ever assumed a deadlier guise than that of the ci-devant valet!

The Trefusis gave an irrepressible start as she saw him; the colour left her lips; her cheeks it could not leave. She began laughing and talking to Morehampton hurriedly, nervously, incoherently, but there was a wild, lurid gleam in her eyes, restless and savage. Her husband touched his hat submissively, but with a queer smile still on his face:

"I beg your pardon, my lord, but may I be allowed to relieve you of the escort of my wife?"

Morehampton twisted himself round, stuck his gold glass in his eye, and stared with all his might; the men crowded closer, stroking their moustaches in curiosity and surprise; the English women, who could understand the speech, suspended the spoonfuls of ice that were en route to their lips, and broke off their conversation for a minute; the Trefusis flushed scarlet to her very brow, her eyes scintillated and glared like a tigress just stung by a shot that inflames all her savage nature into fury—ever ready with a lie, she clung to Morehampton's arms:

"My dear Lord! I know this poor creature very well: he is a lunatic—a confirmed lunatic—a harmless one quite; it is one of his hallucinations that every woman he sees and admires is his wife, who ran away from him, and turned his brain with her infidelity. He is harmless—at least I have always heard so—but pray tell your servants to take him away. It is very horrible!"

It was an admirably-told falsehood!—told, too, with the most natural ease, the most natural compassion imaginable—and it passed muster with Morehampton, who signed to two of his lacqueys.

"Seize that fellow and turn him out of the grounds. How did he get in, Soames? Go for some gendarmes if he resist you," said the Earl, aloud; then bent his head, and added (sotto voce), "How grieved I am, dearest, that you should be so absurdly annoyed. What a shockingly stupid fellow! Brain turned, you say—and for a *wife?*"

But Raymond signed off the two footmen, who were circling gingerly round him like two dogs round a hedgehog, not admiring their task, having a genuine horror of lunacy, and being enervated, probably, by the epicureanism of plush-existence.

"That is a pretty story, my lord, only unfortunately, it

isn't *true*. Ben trovato—but all a humbug! I am as sane as anybody here; much too sane to have my brain turned because my wife ran away from me. Most men would thank their stars for such a kind deliverance! I am come to claim mine, though, for a little business there is to be done, and she is on your arm, my lord. She married me nineteen years ago, and made me repent of it before a month was out."

"Dear, dear! how absurd, and yet how shocking! Pray send him away," whispered the Trefusis, clinging to the Earl's arm, looking, it must be confessed, more like a demon than a divinity, for her lips were white and twitching savagely, and spots of rouge glared scarlet.

"Do you hear me, fellows? Turn that impudent rascal out!" swore Morehampton.

"That fellow's wife! Why, she's De Vigne's wife. Everybody knows that!" muttered Leslie Egerton, sticking his glass in his eye. "Saw him married myself, poor wretch!"

"*Mais qu'est-ce que c'est donc?*" asked Mademoiselle Papillon, edging herself in with a dim delicious idea that it was something detrimental to her rival.

"Kick him out!" "Turn him out!" "An escaped lunatic!" "Impertinent rascal!" "*Ma foi! qu'a-t-il donc!*" "*Mais comme c'est extraordinaire!*" "*Dieu! qu'est-ce que cela veut dire!*" resounded on all sides from Morehampton's guests and the Trefusis's adorers.

"Major De Vigne's wife?" repeated Raymond. "No, she's not, gentlemen: he knows it now, too, and thanks Heaven for it. She married me, as I say, nineteen years ago; more fool I to let her! *Twelve* years ago she married Major de Vigne. So you see, my lord, she is my wife, not his, and I believe what she has done is given a nasty, coarse, impolite term by law. What I tell you is quite true. Here's Captain Chevasney, my lord, who will tell you the same, and tell it better than I. Come, old girl, you've had a long holiday; you must come with me and work for a little while now."

He spoke with a diabolical grin, and, thus appealed to, I went forward and gave Morehampton as succinctly as I could the outlines of the story. The Trefusis's face grew grey as ashes, save where the rouge remained in two bright

crimson spots fixed and unchanged, her eyes glittered in tiger-like fury, and her parasol fell to the ground, its ivory handle snapped in two as her hands clenched upon it, only with a violent effort restraining herself from flying at mine or her husband's throat. For the first time in her life, the clever Greek had her own marked card turned against her; her schemes of malice, of vengeance, of ambition, were all swept away like cobwebs, never to be gathered up again. De Vigne was free, and she was caught in her own toils!

She swung round, sweeping her black Chantilly lace round her, and scattering her sandal-wood perfume on the air, laughing:

"And do you believe this cock-and-bull story, Lord Morehampton?" Her voice came out in a low, fierce hiss, like a serpent's, while her large, sensual, ruby lips curled and quivered with impotent rage. "Do you believe this valet's tale, bribed by a man who would move heaven and earth to prove his lawful marriage false, and the corroborating story told so glibly by a gentleman who, though he calls himself a man of honour, would swear black were white to pleasure his friend?"

"Come, come, there, my lady!" laughed Raymond. "Wait a bit. Don't call us bad names. You can't ride the high horse any more like that, and if you don't take care what you say we'll have you up for libel; we will, I assure you. Come, you used to be wide-awake once, and if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head it may be the worse for you."

"Lord Morehampton, will you endure this? I must appeal,"—began the Trefusis, turning again to that noble Earl, who, with his double eye-glass in his eye, and his under-lip dropped in extreme astonishment, was too much amazed and too much annoyed, at such an unseemly and untimely interruption to his morning fête to take any part in the proceedings whatever. He was a little shy of her, indeed, and kept edging back slowly and surely. She was trembling now from head to foot with rage at her defeat, terror for the consequences of the esclandre, mad wrath and hatred that her prey had slipped from her leash.

Her husband interrupted her with a coarse laugh, before she could finish her sentence.

"You appeal to your *cavalier servante*, madame? Oh

if my Lord Morehampton like to protect you, *I* have no objection; it will take a good deal of trouble off my hands, and I only wish him joy of his bargain. And next time, Lucy, make sure your chickens are hatched before you begin to count them!"

At so summary a proposition from a husband, the Earl involuntarily drew back, blank dismay visible on his purple and supine features. The offer alarmed him! The Trefusis was a deuced handsome woman, but she was a deuced expensive one too, thought he, and he hardly desired to be saddled with her thus. Added to his other expenses, for a permanence, she would go very near to ruin him, not to mention tears, reproaches, and scenes from many other quarters; and "she is a very vixen of a temper!" reflected his lordship wisely, as he edged a little further back, and left her standing alone—who is not alone in defeat?

The Trefusis looked round on the crowds as they hung back from her, with a scathing defiant glance, her fierce black eyes seeming to smite and wither all they lit on; great savage lines gathered round her mouth and down her brow, that was dark with mortification and impotent chained-up fury. She glanced around, her lips twitching like a snared animal's, her face ashy grey, save where the crimson rouge burned in two oval patches, flaring there like streaks of flame, in hideous contrast to the deathly pallor of the rest. She was defeated, outdone, humiliated; the frauds and schemes of twenty years fruitless and unavailing in the end; her victim free, her enemies triumphant! She glared upon us all, till the boldest women shrank away terrified, and the men shuddered as they thought what a fiend incarnate this their "belle femme" was! Then she gathered her costly lace around her. To do her justice, she was game to the last!

"Order my carriage!"

She was beaten, but she would not show it; and to her carriage she swept, her rich Chantilly gathered round her, her silks rustling, her perfume scenting the air, her trained dress brushing the lime-blossoms off the lawn, her step stately and measured, her head defiantly erect, leaving on the grass behind her the fragile ivory handle, symbol of her foiled vengeance—her impotent wrath—her dethroned sovereignty. There was a moment's silence as she swept

across the lawn, her tall Chasseur, in his dashing green and gold uniform, walking before her, her two footmen with their long white wands behind, and at her side, dogging her footsteps, with his sneer of retribution and his smile of vengeance, the valet who had claimed her as his wife. There was a moment's silence; then the tongues were loosened, and her friends, and her rivals, and her adorers spake.

"Gad!" quoth my Lord of Morehampton, "she looked quite ugly, 'pon my soul she did, with those great rouge spots on her cheeks. Curse it! how deuced shocking!"

"*Mon Dieu, milord,*" sneered Mademoiselle Papillon, "I congratulate you! Perhaps you will take the rôle of the *third* husband?"

"Better go and be Queen of the Greeks—deuced sharp woman!" said Lee Phillips.

"Always said that creature was a bad lot. Plucky enough, though!" remarked Leslie Egerton, with his cigarette in his teeth.

"The biter bit!" chuckled old Fantyre. "Well, she was very useful to me, but she was always a bad lot, as you say, Leslie; horrid temper! She should have managed her game better. I've no patience with people who don't make sure of their cards! Dear, dear! who'll read me to sleep of a night?"

And the others all crowded round me, dirty old Fantyre peering closest of all with her little bright, cunning, inquisitive eyes:

"Come, tell us, Chevasney, is it true?"

"I say, old fellow, what's the row?"

So the world talks of us, either in our sorrows or our sins! They were full of curiosity, annoyance, amusement—as it happened to affect them individually; none of them stopped to regret the great lie, to remember the great wrong, to grieve for the debased human nature, and the bitter satire on the Holy Bond of Marriage, that stood out in such black letters in the new story which I added to their repertoire of scandals. *Cancans* amuse us; we never stop to recollect the guilt, the sorrow, or the falsehood, that must give them their foundation-stone, their colouring, and their flavour! Mademoiselle Papillon was perchance nearest of all to the moral of the scene, when she shrugged her little plump shoulders:—

"Who would ever dare marry! It is a lottery in which all draw blanks. In love, one is an angel; in marriage a fiend! Paf! who would risk one's neck in its halter!"

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## CHAPTER XL.

### VALETE.

The spring sunshine which lit up the sparkling wines, and glittering toilettes, and gorgeous liveries of the fête at Enghien, shining on the Trefusis's parure of amethysts, and on the rich scarlet rouge of her cheeks—that flag of defiance which flaunted there in defeat as in victory!—shone at the same hour through the dark luxuriant foliage of the chesnuts at the Diaman du Forêt in Fontainebleau, on the lilac-boughs heavy with massed blossom, on the half-opened rose-buds clinging round the woodwork of the antique walls, and on the swallow's nest nestled under the broad shadow of the eaves. A warm amber light lay on the earth, and in it the gnats were whirling at their play, and the early butterflies fluttering their saffron wings; whilst the distant chimes of a church clock afar off were ringing the quarters slowly, on the stillness which nothing broke. And out on the dark oaken sill of one of the windows, drooping her head upon her hands, while the light flickered down upon her hair through the network of the leaves, leant a woman, alone; heedless, in the depth of her own thought, of the play of the south wind, or the songs of the birds, as both made music about her. She was alone, nothing near her save the bee droning in the cup of the early rose, or the yellow butterfly that settled on her hair unnoticed. Her head was bent, resting on her hand; her face was very pale, save when now and then a deep warm flush passed over it, suddenly to fade again as quickly; her eyes were dark and dreamy, with a yearning tenderness; and on her lips was a smile mournful yet proud, as, half unconsciously, they uttered the words of her thoughts aloud: "I will not leave thee, no, nor yet forsake thee. Where thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God!"

They were the words of an oath—an oath to whose

keeping she would dedicate her life, even though, to so keep it, that life should be in the world's eyes condemned and sacrificed She leant there against the dark woodwork, alone, the silence unbroken that reigned about her, save when the wind swept through the fragrant branches above, or the rush of a bird's delicate wings cleft the air. Suddenly—in the stillness, while yet it was so distant that no other ear could have heard it—she caught a footfall, while its sound was so faint that it did not break the silence, as the spaniel catches the step of his master while yet afar off. She lifted her head with the wild, eager grace that was as natural to her as its freedom to a flower, her eyes growing dark and humid in their expectancy, her colour changing swiftly with the force of a joy so keen that it trenched on anguish, with the hot vivid flush of a love strong as the life in which it was embedded and entwined. Then, with a low, glad cry, Alma sprang, swift as an antelope, to meet him, and to cling to him, as she would have clung to him through evil and adversity, through the scorn of shame and the throes of death, through the taunts of the world, and the ghastly terrors of the grave.

For many moments he could find no words even to tell her that which she never dreamed of, that which panted on his lips; he held her in his arms, crushing her in one long, close embrace, meeting as those meet who would not spend one hour of their lives asunder. For many moments he bent over her, speechless, breathless, straining her madly to him, spending on her lips the passion that found no fitting utterance in the words; then, stifled and hoarse in its very agony of joy, his voice broke out:

"You will be my wife—thank God with me—I am free!"

* * * * * * *

The day stole onward; faintly from the far distance swung the silvery sound of evening bells; the low south winds stirred amongst the lilac-blossoms, shaking their rich fragrance out upon the air; the bees hummed themselves to slumber in the hearts of folded roses; the mellow amber light grew deeper and clearer, while the day was passing onward, ere long to sink into night. And as the rays of the western sun through the parted network of the leaves fell about his feet, shining in the eyes of the woman he loved, and bathing her hair in light where it swept across

his breast, De Vigne bowed his head in thanksgiving; not alone for the joy in which his life was steeped, not alone for his freedom from his deadly curse, but for that hour, past yet still so near; so near that still he sickened at it, as men at the memory of some horrible death they have but by a hair's breadth escaped. That hour when, for the first time in all his wayward, headlong, vehement manhood, he had *resisted*; and flung off from him the crime which, yielded to but one fleeting instant, would, though never tracked or known by man, have made him taste fire in every kiss, quail before the light of every day, and start in the sweat of agony, and the terror of remembered guilt from his sweetest rest, his most delicious sleep. That hour in the forest solitude, when goaded, taunted, reviled, maddened, he had been face to face with what he loathed, parted by her from what he loved, yet had had strength to fling her from him, unharmed and unchastised. That hour which had been the crowning temptation of his life when he had had force to cast it behind him with a firm hand, and to flee from it—fearing himself, as the wisest and holiest amongst us need do in those dark hours which come to all, when there is but a plank between us and the fathomless abyss of some great guilt.

And while the starlit night of the early summer stole onwards towards the earth, he bowed his head over the woman who had cleaved to him through all, and looking backward to his Past, thanked God.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### ADIEU AU LECTEUR.

The history is told! It is one simple enough and common enough in this world, and merely traces out the evil which accrued to two men in similar circumstances, although of different temperaments, from that error of judgment—an Early Marriage. Both my friends took advantage of their liberty, you see, to tie themselves again! I *don't* say in that respect, "Go thou and do likewise," ami lecteur, if you be similarly situated, but rather, if you are

free—keep so! A wise man, they say, knows when he is well off.

In "The Times" the other day, I read among the deaths "At Paris, in her ninety-seventh year, Sarah, Viscountess Fantyre." Gone at last, poor old woman, under the sod, where shrewdness and trickery, rouge and trump cards, are of no avail to her, though she held by them to the last. She died as she had lived, I hear, sitting at her whist-table, be-wigged and be-rouged, gathering her dirty, costly lace about her, quoting George Selwyn, dealing herself two honours and six trumps, picking up the guineas with a cunning twinkle of her monkeyish eyes, when death tapped her on the brain, and old Fantyre was carried off the scene in an apoplectic fit; while her partner, the Comte de Beaujeu, murmured over his tabatière, "Peste! Death is horribly ill-bred; he should have let us played the conqueror!"

What memoirs the old woman might have left us; dirty ones, sans doute, but what memoirs of intrigues, plots, scandals, schemes; what rich glimpses behind the cards, what amusing peeps beneath the purple! A great many people, though, are glad, I dare say, that the Fantyre experiences are not down in black and white, and no publisher, perhaps, would have been courageous enough to risk their issue. They would have blackened plenty of fair reputations had their gunpowder burst; they would have offended a world which loves to prate of its morals, cackle of its purity, and double-lock its chamber-doors; they would have given us keys to many skeleton cupboards, which we should have opened, to turn away more heart-sick than before!

Her protégée, the Trefusis, has in nowise gone off the scene, nor did she consent to drop down into a valet's wife. Her exposure at Morehampton's villa had been the most bitter thing life could have brought her, for she had read enough of Rochefoucauld to think with him, "Le ridicule déshonore plus que le déshonneur." She sought the friendly shadow of Notre Dame de Lorette. Fearing her husband no longer, she bribed him no more; and if you like to see her any day, walk down the Champs Elysées, or look out in the Pré Catalan for a carriage with lapis-lazuli liveries, dashing as the Montespan's, and you will have pointed to you in a

moment the full-blown magnificence (now certainly coarse, and I dare say only got up at infinite trouble from Blanc de Perle and Bulli's best rouge) of the quasi-milliner of Frestonhills. She has at present, *en proie*, a Russian prince, and thrives upon roubles. Her imperial sables are the envy of the Quartier; and as women who range under the Piratical Flag don't trouble their heads with a Future, the Trefusis does not stop to think that she may end in a Maison Dieu, with a bowl of soupe maigre, when her beauty shall have utterly lost all that superb and sensual bloom which lured De Vigne in his hot youth to such deadly cost.

A young man married is a man that's marred.

How can the man fail to be so, who chooses his yoke-fellow for life, in all the blind haste, the crude taste of his earlier years, when taste in all things alters so utterly from youth to manhood? In what the youth thinks so wise, fair, excellent, half a score or a score years later on he sees but little beauty. I have heard young fellows in their college terms, utterly recant in June all they swore by religiously in January, equally earnest and sincere, moreover, in their recantation and their adoration! Taste, bias, opinion, judgment, all alter as judgment widens, taste ripens, and sight grows keener from long mixing amidst the world, and longer studying its varied views. God help, then, the man who has taken to his heart, and into his life, a wife who, fair in his eyes in all the glamour of love, all the "purpureal light of youth," is as insufficient to him in his maturer years as are the weaker thoughts, the cruder studies, the unformed judgment, the boyish revelries of his youth. The thoughts might be well in their way, the studies beneficial, the judgment generous and just, the revels harmless, but he has *outgrown them*—gone beyond them—left them far behind him; and he can no more return to them, and find them sufficient for him, than he can return to the Gradus ad Parnassum of his first school-days.

So the wife, too, may be good in her way: he may strive to be faithful to her and to cleave to her as he has sworn to do; he may seek with all his might to come to her side, to bring back the old feeling, to join the broken chain, to find her all he needs and all he used to think her; he may strive with all his might to do this, but it is Sysiphus-labour; the scales have fallen from his eyes, he loves her no longer

It is not his fault; she belongs to the things of his youth which pleased a crude state, an immature judgment; he sees her now *as she is*, and she is far below him, far behind him; if he progress he goes on alone, if he fall back to her level, his mind deteriorates with every day that dawns! Would he bring to the Commons no arguments riper than the crude debates that were his glory at the Union; would he condemn himself in science never to discard the unsound theories that were the delight of his early speculations; would he deny himself the right to fling aside the moonshine philosophies, the cobweb metaphysics that he wove in his youth, and forbid himself title to advance beyond them? Surely not! Yet he would chain himself through his life long to a yoke-fellow as unfit and insufficient to his older years, as ever the theories and thoughts of his youth can be; as fatal to his peace while he is bound to her, as they would be fatal to the mind they dwarfed, to the brain they crammed into a prison-cell!

In youth Rosaline seems very fair,

> None else being by
> Herself poised with herself in either eye.

A young man meets a young girl in society, or at the sea-side, or on the deck of a Rhine steamer, she has fresh colouring, bright blue eyes, or black ones, as the case may be, very nice ankles, and a charming voice. She is a pretty girl to everybody; to him she is beautiful—divine! He thinks, over his pipe, that she is just his ideal of Œnone, if he be of a poetic turn; or meditates that she's "a clipper of a girl, and, by Jupiter! what a pretty foot!" if of a material disposition. He falls in love with her, as the phrase goes; he flirts with her at water-parties, and pays her a few morning calls; he sees her trifling with a bit of fancy-work, and hears her pretty voice say a few things about the weather. A few glances, a few waltzes, a few tête-à-têtes, and he proposes. It is a pretty dream for a few months; an easy yoke, perhaps, for a few years; then gradually the illusions drop one by one, as the leaves drop from a shaken rose, loth, yet forced to fall. He finds her mind narrowed, bigoted, ill-stored, with no single thought in it akin to his own. What could he learn of it in those few morning calls, those few ball-room talks, when the

glamour was on him, and he would have cared nothing though she could not have spelled his name: Or—he finds her a bad temper (when does temper ever show in society, and how could he see her without society's controlling eye upon her?), snarling at her servants, her dogs, the soup, the east winds; meeting him with petulant acerbity, revenging on him her milliner's neglect, her maid's stupidity, her migraine, or her torn Mechlin! Or—he finds her a heartless coquette, cheapening his honour, holding his name as carelessly as a child holds a mirror, forgetting, like the child, that a breath on it is a stain; turning a deaf ear to his remonstrance; flinging at him, with a sneer, some died-out folly—"before *I* knew you, sir!"—that she has ferreted out; goading him to words that he knows, for his own dignity, were best unsaid, then turning to hysteria and *se posant en martyre*. Or—and this, I take it is the worst case for both—the wife is a good wife, as many (ladies say most) wives are; he knows it, he feels it, he honours her for it,—but she is a bitter disappointment to him! He comes home worn-out with a day's labour, but successful from it; he sits down to a tête-à-tête dinner; he tells her of the hard-won election, the hot-worded debate in the House, the issue of a great law case that he has brought off victorious, the compliment to his corps from the commander-in-chief, of the one thing that is the essence of his life and the end of his ambition; she listened with a vague, amiable, absent smile, but her heart is not with him, nor her ear. "Yes, dear—indeed—how very nice! But cook has ruined that splendid haunch. Do look! it is really burnt to a cinder!" She never gives him any more than that! She cannot help it; her mission is emphatically to "suckle fools and chronicle small-beer." The perpetual drop, drop, of her small worries, her puerile pleasures, is like the ceaseless dropping of water on his brain; she is less capable of understanding him in his defeats, his victories, his struggles, than the senseless writing-paper, which, though it cannot respond to them, at least lets him score his thoughts on its blank pages, and will bear them unobliterated! Yet this disunion in union is common enough in this world, très-chers; when a man marries early it is too generally certain.

A man early married, moreover, is *prematurely aged*.

While he is yet young his wife is old; while he is in the fullest vigour of his manhood, she is grey, and faded, and ageing; youth has long gone from her, while in him it is still fresh; and while away from her he is young, by her side he feels old. Married—in youth he takes upon himself burdens that should never weigh save upon middle age; in middle age he plays the part that should be reserved for age alone.

And, to take it in a more practical sense, scarcely the less inevitably from every point is "a young man married a man's that's marred." If to men of fortune, with every opiate of pleasure and excitement to drown the gall and fret of uncongenial or unhappy union, early marriage blots and mars life as it does, how much more bitter still to those who are poor and struggling with the burden of work, hardly done and scantily paid, upon their shoulders, is its fatal error! A young fellow starts in life with no capital, but a good education and a profession, which, like all professions, cannot be lucrative to him till time has mellowed his reputation, and experience made him, more or less, a name in it. It brings him quite enough for his bachelor wants; he lives comfortably enough in his chambers or his lodgings, with no weightier daily outlay than his pipe and his chop; study comes easy to him, with a brain that has no care gnawing on it; society is cheap, for his comrades come contentedly for punch, or beer, and think none the worse of him because he does not give them turtle and Comet wines. He can live for little if he like; if he want change and travel, he can take his knap-sack and a walking tour; nobody is dependent on him; if he be straitened by poverty, the strain is on him alone; he is not tortured by the cry of those who look to him for daily bread, the world is before him to choose at least where he will work in it; in a word, he is *free!* But, if he marry, his up-hill career is fettered by a clog which draws him backward every step he sets; his profession is inadequate to meet the expenses that crowd in on him; if he keep manfully and honestly out of debt, economy and privation eat his very life away, as, say what romancists may, they ever must; if he live beyond his income, as too many professional men are almost driven to do in our day, there is a pressure on him like the weights they laid upon offenders in the old Newgate press-

yards. He toils, he struggles, he works, as brain-workers must, feverishly and at express speed to keep in the van at all; he is old, while by right of years he should yet be young, in the constant harrassing rack and strain to "keep up appearances," and *seem* well off while every shilling is of consequence; he writes for his bread with the bray of brawling children above his head; he goes to his office turning over and over in wretched arithmetic the sums he owes to the baker and the butcher; he smiles courteously upon his patients or his clients with the iron in his soul and county-court summonses hanging over his head. He returns from his rounds or his office, or comes out of his study after a long day, jaded, fagged, worn out; comes, not to quiet, to peace, to solitude, with a cigar and a book, to anything that would soothe the fagged nerves and ease the strain for an hour at least: but only for some miserable petty worry, some fresh small care; to hear his wife going into mortal agonies because her youngest son has the measles, or bear the leer of the servants when they say "the tax-gatherer's called again, and, please, must he go away?"

Wise are the old words of Walter Raleigh: "Thou bindest thyself for life, for that which will perchance never last nor please thee one year: for the desire dieth when it is obtained, and the affection perisheth when it is satisfied!"

Correggio *literally* dying in the heat and burden of the day, of the weary weight, the torturing rack of home-cares; his family and his poverty dragging him downward and clogging his genius as the drenching rains upon its wings clog the flight of a bird; is but sample of the death-in-life, the age-in-youth, the self-begotten curse, the self-elected doom, that almost inevitably dogs the steps of a man who has married early, be his station what it may, be his choice what it will.

> This spring of Love resembleth
> The uncertain glory of an April day,
> Which shows now all the beauty of the sun,
> And by-and-by a cloud takes all away!

Such *is* love, rarely anything better, scarcely ever anything more durable. Such are all early loves, invariably,

inevitably. God help, then, though we may count them by the myriad, those who in, and for, that one brief "April day," which, warm and shadowless at morning, sees the frost down long before night, pay with headstrong thoughtlessness, in madman's haste, the one priceless birthright upon earth—Freedom!

THE END.

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